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THE CAREER

OF THE

CHRIST-IDEA IN HISTORY.

BY HUDSON TUTTLE,

AUTHOR OF "THE CAREER OF THE GOD-IDEA IN HISTORY,"
"ARCANA OF NATURE," ETC.

When the historian of Jesus shall be as free in his judgments as the historians of Buddha or of Mohammed, he will not dream of insulting those who do not think as he does. — RENAN.

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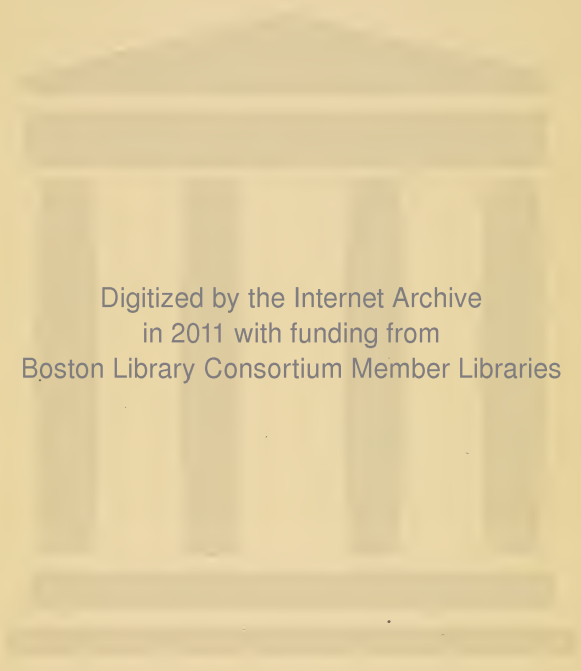
THE present volume was written because
I was impelled to write.

HUDSON TUTTLE.

BOSTON, *Jan.* 20, 1870.

G. H. B. Sullivan, Esq.

1871



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CONTENTS.

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Great Antiquity of the Christ-Idea. Origin of. Statement of its Primary Parts. The Study of Savage Mind. Its Aid. No Distinction between Good and Evil, primarily. They separate. An Evil God introduced. Recoil against Antagonism of Evil. The Supreme removed one Step farther off. Gradation of Spirits. The Mediator. Myths of the Golden Age. Man's Fall. The Golden Future. Man's Redemption. Immortality. Spirit-incarnation. Incarnation of the Gods. Doctrine of the Inherent Evil of Matter, and its Results. The Wages of Sin. Punishment by Proxy. Benefits of Sacrifice. Human Sacrifice. Vicarious Atonement and Infinite Sacrifice. How shall the Subject be studied? . . . Page 13

II.

CAREER OF THE CHRIST-IDEA IN HINDOSTAN, PERSIA, AND THE WEST.

Recent Discoveries. India the Hot-bed of Myths. An historical Fossil. Incarnation of Vishnu. The Eighth as Crishna. Bhagavat Geeta. Its Narrative. Advent of Buddha. Lamaism. Buddhism in China. Confucius. Zoroaster. Quetzalcoalt, the Aztec God-Man. . . 28

III.

JESUS OF NAZARETH: THE PROPHECIES OF THE
MESSIAH.

The Hebrew Prophets spoke of a Temporal Messiah. He should come of the Line of David. Intensity of this Belief. The Race of False Prophets born from the Public Anxiety. There are no Prophecies of a Spiritual Messiah. 48

IV.

CONCEPTION AND GENEALOGY.

The Immaculate Conception. Its Impossibility. Necessity of Divine Parentage. A Virgin Mother required by the Prophecies. The Mother must have been miraculously born. Contradiction of the Gospel Writers. They prove themselves wholly unreliable. The Holy Family . 53

V.

BIRTH AND YOUTH OF JESUS.

The Wise Men. The Story of the Angel, and Flight into Egypt. Herod destroys the Children. The Star. The Shepherds. Visit to the Temple. A Myth and Solution. 63

VI.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, AND HIS RELATIONS TO JESUS.

The Prophecies made a Forerunner necessary. Growth of the Myth. Was there such a Man? An Essenean. Baptism by Water and Fire. John and Jesus come in contact. Episode of the Temptation. 71

VII.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Occasion of. Summary of Morality. Conflict of Testimony. It contained no new Truths. The Golden Rule. The Fatherhood of God, and Brotherhood of Man. Ideas of great Antiquity. Jesus taught Essenean Doctrines. He dealt in Moral Maxims as old as the Ages. . 77

VIII.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS.

It was necessary that Jesus should be a Wonder-worker. The Prophecies. As the Messiah, he must perform Miracles. The Wine Miracle. Feeding of the Multitude. The Transfiguration. Miracles support the lowest form of Faith. The Apostles rested theirs on Works. Faith good only for Ignorance. The Miracles produced no Enduring Effect on the Beholders. Progress. The Age has grown out of its Childish Ideas. . . . 81

IX.

THE APOSTLES SENT FORTH.

The Jewish Prejudice of Jesus. The sending-forth of the Twelve and of the Seventy. He falls into the erroneous Beliefs of his Time. 92

X.

THE DEATH OF JESUS.

The Fatal Journey. The Failure of his Hopes of founding a Temporal Kingdom. Its Exchange for a Spiritual Empire. Entrance into Jerusalem. Conflicting Records.

Power of the Prophecies to shape these Legends. His Disciples still believed in his Temporal Reign. He saw Success only in Death. The Agony. Capture and Trial. Death.	94
--	----

. XI.

BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

The Sneer of the Pagan World. The Disciples did not expect the Resurrection. The Biblical Narrative inadmissible. Appearance of Jesus. How these Myths became current. Miracles at his Death. Wholly improbable and total Failures.	104
---	-----

XII.

DESCENT INTO HELL.

A Pagan Myth, with the Substitution of a new Name. .	111
--	-----

XIII.

THE GOSPELS.

False Reverence to be cast aside. Our First Duty to gain the Truth. A Christian cannot write a correct History of Jesus. Christian Consciousness. The Philosophers of his Day make no Mention of Jesus. Necessity of a Central Person for the Christ-Idea. Our only Reliance is the New Testament. When written. By whom. The Apochryphal Gospels.	112
--	-----

XIV.

THE EXTENSION OF CHRISTIANITY.

The Hebrews. The Semitic Race. David and Solomon. Indo-European Race. The Samaritan. Blending

of Races under the Government of Rome. Its Effects. Religion of the Heathen Sages. Mysteries of. Survey of the Age. The Ideas of the Semitic transplanted into Indo-European Soil. Jerusalem swept away. The Actual Jesus lost in the Ideal Christ. Christianity based on Paganism more than Judaism. Persecutions. Cause and Effect of. Christianity has entered into, not directed, the Spirit of the Age. Summary. 118

XV.

RESUME OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JESUS.

Example of Theological Logic. The Baptist. Type of the Hermits Jesus a Hermit. Necessity of his Existence. Not Divine. A Man. His Mission. Not Unique. Necessity of a Mediator. Deification. The Virgin. Myths reposing on older Myths. The Man, Jesus, an Essenean. The Essenes and their Doctrines. Early Teachings of Jesus. He changes, elated by Success. His Race. His only Authority was Truth. His Miracles. The Error of Christianity. What is left? Jesus, a Man: the Truths he taught. The Ideal of a Manly Life. 140

XVI.

THE ULTIMATE OF THE CHRIST-IDEA.

Interpretation of the Incarnation. Its Universal Application. Theological Plan of Divine Government. Boundless Capabilities, Infinite Progress, are the Birthright of the Human Soul. Man, if redeemed, must redeem Himself. Sin cannot be forgiven; it must be outgrown. . 157

I.

INTRODUCTORY.

What then, you will say, can the Fathers contradict each other! and what is there so surprising in that? — MELANCTHON.

Christ has given himself for our sins. . . . Since our sins are so great that nothing less than a ransom so stupendous can remove them, shall we still seek to attain unto righteousness by the strength of our will, by the force of law, by the doctrines of men? — LUTHER.

THE Christ-idea, — that of an incarnate, divine mediator between God and man, — is of remote origin. It is a necessity of the belief of savage man in the relations he sustains to the Infinite. It is the culmination of a series of beliefs, growing out of the reception of the doctrine of the inherent sinfulness of matter and purity of spirit, and forms a part of the solution of the vexed problem of the existence of good and evil. Its several parts, formed of gigantic hypotheses, may be thus stated: —

1. God must be perfect, and hence man must have been *created* perfect.

2. Man is now very imperfect, hence must have fallen.

3. Between man's imperfection and God's perfection, man's finiteness and God's infiniteness, there must be a mediator.

4. As man by his fall has committed an infinite sin, only the Infinite can atone for it.

5. Hence the mediator must be the Infinite, incarnated in flesh ; must be a God-man, partaking of a double nature.

A clear understanding of this important chain of deductions, which have shaped the destinies of the races of mankind, can only be obtained by the study of mind on the plane of advance where these beliefs originated. The study of our own minds, or of those about us, will only lead astray ; for we see nature from a different standpoint from the rude peoples of the early ages. The explanation must be asked of the savage ; for he is the same in all ages. The answer he gave while standing on the threshold of time, to the questions what and wherefore is evil, has given tone and direction to all these myths. His view of creation is that of a child. He is suddenly ushered into a wonder-world. Everything is surprising, inexplicable, mysterious. Fear, anger, awe, terror, all the passions of his soul, are by turns aroused. Nature to him is living. What afterwards becomes separated into God and Matter he regards as one. He knows nothing of law. Everything is arbitrary, inscrutable, miraculous. All objects are personified. The elements are individualized. They think, feel, and know.

Ages of growth were required for even this stage of advancement, and ages more to build up a system of myths defining the relations these idealities sustain to man. The records of all races during this

transitional period are almost identical. The human mind, being similarly organized in all the diverse types of man, under similar circumstances receives the same thoughts ; and hence it always entered the fog in the same manner, and resorted to similar means of escape.

Primarily there was no distinction between good and evil. The same Hindoo god creates and destroys, and is no more considered to be impelled by evil motives than nature in her ways of elaboration and decay. The Egyptians solved the problem of the intricate relation between the two principles by supposing that Typho, the evil, was twin brother to Osiris, the good. Zoroaster taught that there was one powerful prince of darkness, who held a legion of wicked spirits in subjection, and made incessant warfare on the god of light. This doctrine the Jews received during their captivity at Babylon. They previously considered Jehovah the author and undisputed ruler of creation ; but he became in a manner limited by this myth, which has descended to the present, and forms a portion of Orthodox theology.

The infant man, the savage, is overwhelmed by the aspect of nature. He feels reverence and awe for the provident hand that apparently supplies his wants. The abundant game, the plentiful rains, the ripening of the wild fruits, in succession excite his gratitude. There must be a great and good savage, outside of or within this visible world, who acts directly for the welfare of men. The philosopher

feels himself to be but an insignificant atom in the universe: the savage revels in the belief that he is the born king of the world. He projects himself out into nature, and, magnified like the mirage seen in mountain clouds, worships the visions as God.

As he advances, he meets with counter-facts. If nature is created especially for him, it should be unalloyed good. It is not. The whirlwind and the hail beat down the labor of his hands; the storm wrecks his rude ship at sea; the earth rocks beneath his feet, and like dust evanishes the dwellings he has reared; foul pestilence snatches the beloved from his sight; miasm fills the air with its insidious and deadly presence; nations are aroused to war; the hand of brother is turned against brother; and, look where he will, there is a dire warfare between conflicting forces.

Unable to fathom this contradiction, unwilling to refer the bad as well as the good to the same beneficent deity, a god of evil is introduced, whose mission is to war against, and thwart in every conceivable manner, the purposes of the good divinity.

The human mind recoiled at the idea of placing the supreme being in such antagonism. It resorted to the doctrine of emanations. The creator was removed one step from the one pure essence. He was called Brahma by the Hindoo, Ammon by the Egyptians, and Ormuzd by the Persians. He was the active creator, while the eternal one remained in a state of absolute repose.

Even this second deity was far beyond human

sympathy. If the chief of a tribe, or the king of a nation, was all but inaccessible to his subjects, how much farther removed must be the controller of the universe! The idea of a kingly ruler naturally attached itself to him, and in almost all languages his name has that significance.

Between the first emanation and man was an innumerable gradation of spirits, who served as messengers, received prayers, interceded with offended gods, and taught the ceremonials of religion. Of these, one possessed superior power. This mediator the Persians named Mithras; the Cabalists, Metraton; and the Platonized Jews of Alexandria, Logos, or the Word. To him they referred all the divine manifestations recorded in the Old Testament, as they did not believe any man had at any time seen God.

As the divine being was too far removed to hear prayers, it was useless to offer them directly to him. Consequently the mediator was addressed. The various incarnations of Vishnu usurped the place of Brahma; Osiris, that of Ammon; Mithras, that of Ormuzd. Apollo received the worship intended for Jupiter, and the belief is fossilized in modern prayers in the formula, "Through our Lord, Jesus Christ."

The beneficent one could create nothing imperfect and wrong. Man found himself surrounded by apparent imperfections, and a daily sufferer. As we look back to the days of our childhood, free from anxiety and care, as supremely blessed, so man looks to the early ages, and, pre-occupied by these supposi-

tions, there locates the golden age. All the ancient nations believed in this primitive Paradise or Garden of Eden.

If man was created perfect, and placed in a perfect world, he must have fallen from that high estate of freedom and purity. Here originates the varied myths of his fall. The Hindoo story is unknown ages older than the others, and may be taken as their type.

One Sicritus, a Greek philosopher, according to Strabo, was sent to India by Alexander the Great to learn the manner of life of its hermit sages. He was told by a Brahman, that, in the beginning of the world, milk, wine, honey, and oil flowed spontaneously from fountains, and peace and plenty reigned supreme. But, man making a bad use of these gifts, the Creator took them away, and compelled man to labor.

The fabulous Eden is described in Genesis; and Adam is said to have been expelled therefrom for disobeying the commands of the Creator, although these commands were given seemingly for the express purpose of being disobeyed.

The myth is preserved in the sacred volumes of the Chinese. Then, said the golden-tongued Confucius, mankind dwelt in a beautiful garden, in the midst of which grew a tree bearing the apples of immortality, guarded by a winged serpent. The earth spontaneously produced the most delicious fruits. Peace, plenty, and universal happiness reigned. There was no suffering nor death. There was no

sin ; for men were good without effort, and the moral and intellectual harmony responded to the delightful and unvarying perfection of nature.

From this desirable condition, man did not fall abruptly, but by slow gradations. The terrible fact of his present state is thus solved.

The cycle is finished, as usual, by a return to a future golden era, inaugurated by Tien-tse, a son of heaven, making his advent into the world, doing away with sin, and restoring harmony.

A belief in great cycles of change, ever returning on themselves, seems an integral part of primitive thought. As man originated in and fell from paradise, so to paradise must he ultimately return. If the sun has set in golden glory, its morning twilight already blushes the horizon of the future. The new age of perfection is to be ushered in by the advent of a great and good man. With the Hindoo it is to be the tenth incarnation of Vishnu himself. The Chinese expect the holy one to appear on their sacred mountain Kou-lu-lun, and bring all the world under the dominion of the Celestial Empire. Their sacred volumes are filled with prophecies of the golden age, the benefits of which are to fall on the Chinese Empire, which will then extend its sway over the whole earth.

The holy one will unite in himself all the virtues of heaven and earth. By his justice the world will be re-established in the ways of righteousness. He will labor, and suffer much. He must pass the great torrent, whose waves shall enter into his soul ;

but he alone can offer up to the Lord a sacrifice worthy of him.

"The holy one does not seek himself, but the good of others. He enriches others, and impoverishes himself. He dies to save the world." "We expect a king. When he comes, he will deliver us from all misery. He will restore us to new life." "We expect this divine man, and he is to come after three thousand years." "The people long for his coming, as the dry grass longs for the clouds and rainbow."

Philo, an Alexandrian Jew, who taught contemporary with Jesus, preceding him by birth by about forty years, drew brilliant representations of the coming time, when the Lord's chosen people, the Jews, should be gathered together, and the holy guiding spirit, seen by *their* eyes only, should rule over them. All nations would then bow to their moral and mental superiority. The fiercest animals would become the companions of man, and the earth bloom in a perennial beauty that the imagination cannot conceive.

The Persians believed that such an one awaited to summon and reduce the whole world to the government of their "land of light."

The Jews expected, with ecstatic longing, the coming of the Messiah, and a Christian sect are now ardently predicting his "second coming" in the heart of the civilization of the nineteenth century.

Then will dawn the millennium when peace and happiness shall reign among men, and the lion and

the lamb lie down together. It is a beautiful dream, and will be fulfilled. Humanity will reach the millennium, not by the advent of a Messiah, a Vishnu, or an Aztec Quetzalcoalt, but by slow and silent growth.

With the problems of past and future came the dim conceptions of immortality, greatly modifying the beliefs by which they were connected. The spirit would not only exist forever: it had always existed. It was an offspring of one grade of emanations of the divine one. Hence every birth was a divine incarnation: death was liberation.

Without distinction of grades, all spiritual beings except the eternal could and did thus become clothed in flesh. In this manner the spirit was compelled to serve a probation on earth. If it became sufficiently pure, it arose to higher grades of being; but, if not, it was compelled to become again incarnated. Sometimes great and good men returned, out of pure benevolence, to their fellow-men; and such, by having felt the sorrows and temptations of earth, could justly judge of its sins, and sympathize with the weary, unfortunate, and distressed. They were thus enabled, by their broad and elevated views, to aid humanity; and, after their departure, they remembered the toilers of earth, and interceded with the higher gods for their welfare.

Ardently believing this, it was easy to suppose the gods of higher emanations, differing not in kind, but only in degree, would occasionally, from compassion, become incarnated. Vishnu entered the human

form as Crishna, labored, suffered, and died for mankind ; and such faith did he awaken, that, if a sinner but utter his name at the hour of death, fully believing that he was Vishnu, he insures salvation. The great and beneficent spirit, descending in the form of Buddha, performed a similar mission. He went further ; and, after laboring all his mental life, grandly closed by visiting the lower regions, where souls were imprisoned, to encourage and instruct them. This was at least two thousand years before Jesus re-enacted the same drama. So pure and holy became the great Buddha, that he ascended to paradise without passing through the portals of death.

The Egyptians believed that Osiris was an incarnate god, the benefactor of the living, and the judge of the dead. This transmigration had a double significance. If the spirit, by entering the mortal body, can serve a grand and noble purpose in the aid it thus furnishes humanity, — on the other hand, repeated transmigrations confined to ordinary mortals, who labor, suffer, and act the part of drudges, are ignoble, and painful to contemplate. The spirit, being an emanation from the eternal one, must be pure and holy. Hence, if, while in contact with the flesh, it became sinful and corrupt, it follows logically, from the premises, that it is the flesh, and not the spirit, that is evil. Its connection with the flesh is the cause of all sin.

The descending of a divine being to take on himself the sins of the flesh requires godlike benevo-

lence and infinite sacrifice. This doctrine is consistent with itself, and, brooded over by the hermits of the Ganges, agitated in the minds of Egyptian priests under the shadows of the pyramids, was received through Hebrew theology into Christianity, and directly through Puritanism pours its bitter waters into the present. No belief has exerted such tremendous influence on human destiny as this at first apparently harmless and philosophic statement, that evil is derived from the imperfections of matter. It introduces a deadly feud into the living temple. The spirit is a prisoner, confined in a living dungeon. Pure, holy, divine, it is chained to that which is inherently debased, depraved, and evil. Its position is awful to contemplate. It is a beautiful, spotless virgin married to a beast ; a god chained in unholy lust to a demon.

Men believed this, and, believing, revolted with all the energy of their natures. They trampled the flesh beneath the relentless feet of the spirit. Every natural instinct and desire was of the flesh. Hunger, thirst, the passions, all were unholy. They, with proud disdain for the appetites, starved themselves to skeletons ; refused drink ; cast women from them as a viper ; scourged, burned, and lacerated themselves in the most cruel manner ; and sought, by fasting, prayer, and contemplation, to so far arise above the earth that it would not be necessary for them to be again confined in its loathsome embrace.

From this intense belief in the sinfulness of matter most of the ancient nations held that their great

and mystic heroes were born of virgins. Though this did not free them from the flesh, it obviated the necessary stain of the passions.

The spirit was compelled to atone for the sins forced on it by the body, either in the flesh or afterwards. There were rewards for well-doing, and punishments for sin. Whatever the spirit sighed for, even those things considered unlawful here, were lavishly bestowed. Paradise, in the heated imagination, became a royal city ; and the Eternal, a mighty king, surrounded by pomp and regal ostentation. Why not ? The highest ideal of human felicity the mind had then presented was the courts of kings, and the fancy could picture no higher.

The sinner must receive the reverse. To be compelled to remain on earth, changing from form to form, was a severe punishment. The Asiatic, annoyed with poisonous reptiles, employs them as instruments of torture for the wicked. Fire, the most subtle and purifying of elements, seemingly antagonistic and destructive to matter, at the same time causing intensest pain, was early and universally adopted as a means of punishment. It was employed as an ordeal. Some passed through it, or caused their children to do so, as a baptism instead of water. Others burned themselves to death, supposing that they thus became pure, and avoided the purification of fire in the hereafter. Burning of the dead was adopted for a similar reason.

These punishments were not to last forever. They were inflicted only for purification ; and even

Ahrimanes, the prototype of Satan, ultimately would become pure and happy,

The Hindoos believe that a man can do more good than is sufficient to save himself, and that this stock can be transferred to others.

Every prayer, good deed, almsgiving, offering, and penance is stock invested in paradise, which can be used to benefit the departed ; and, their sins thus canceled, they can ascend to realms of light. This important dogma was received by Catholicism, and, in case of Jesus, by all Protestantism.

The transition from this belief to that of punishment by proxy is exceedingly easy. The Hebrew laws commanded the sacrifice of animals, grain, etc. They were similar to those of surrounding nations, and by no means unique.

The blood was thought to be the life. The largest and finest animals were always chosen ; and this blood, streaming from the altar, was deemed of greatest efficacy, particularly acceptable and delightful to the offended gods. Human sacrifice was of still higher value, and was practiced by every nation of antiquity. The custom appears among the Jews in the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, and the crucifixion of Jesus. The latter event occurred at the passover, when the pascal lamb was sacrificed by each family ; and the high priest remarked, that it was "good that one man should die for all the people," clearly indicating, that, while the lamb atoned for family sins, a higher offering was required for the nation.

Such is a brief outline of the grand mythology which has shaped the history of the world. The causes and necessities of a belief in an incarnate divinity are apparent. It is the fashion to regard the system of Christianity as unique, springing up to golden harvest among the rank weeds of paganism, like a divine light in the surrounding darkness. If this were true, it certainly would be miraculous. It is our task to gather the golden strands of truth that run through the pagan world, and show how they all merge in Christianity. We are not the only favored people. Others have had mediators born of virgin mothers. The devotees of Buddha and Vishnu outnumber us two to one, and with stronger faith are more blindly devotional than our most ardent believers. The religious fervor of the West is tame and insipid to that of the Ganges.

Tread with care, then, on these darling beliefs. Do not say they are fables,—the tricks of hypocrisy and knavery on ignorant credulity. Millions and hundreds of millions bow to the shrines of their gods with equal reverence and faith as the Christian, and in their hearts as deeply commiserate the deluded followers of a carpenter's son as the latter possibly can their delusion. The day of scoffing other religions has passed. The faiths that have satisfied great empires are realities if false. They must be studied as manifestations of mind, without regard to their truth or falsehood. Let us examine our own systems as though we were Brahmans or Persians, and observe how it would then appear to us.

Rather, let us rise above all prejudice whatever, and learn the truth of all systems. Is *our* mediator of *another* type from that of other races?

Is his character changed otherwise than new modes of thought demand? Did he not come in the fullness of time as a personification of an ideal want, as other incarnations came to other races?

We shall see.

II.

CAREER OF THE CHRIST-IDEA IN HINDOSTAN, PERSIA, AND THE WEST.

I am the creation and the dissolution of the whole universe. There is nothing greater than I. . . . I am all things: I am life. I am the eternal seed of all nature. . . . Have faith in me. No one who worships me can perish. Forgetting all other duties, address thyself to me as the only asylum. I will deliver thee from all sin.—CRISHNA, IN “BHAGAVAT GEETA.”

And the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. . . . The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and, without him, was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men.—RECORD OF ST. JOHN.

I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.—JESUS OF NAZARETH.

THE recent discoveries in the literature of Hindostan have poured a flood of light on the origin of the doctrines of Christian theology. India has been the great hot-bed of religious dogmas. To her may be traced nearly all the doctrines which have successively agitated the minds of nations and races. Suffering from the curse a blind obedience to infallibility always entails for thousands of years, she has remained stationary in religion, while other peoples have advanced. Greece captivated the world with her learning; Rome spread her conquering wings

over the earth, flourished through the centuries, and expired ; the great empires of Europe arose, and the New World became peopled ; yet India remains unchanged. She is a fossil, of the same value to the historian as a petrification to the geologist. The fountain from which Egyptians, Persians, and Hebrews drank their draughts of religious lore still flows, and we can learn from it the first ideas of their elaborated dogmas.

The incarnation of Vishnu is the only myth which relates to the present investigation. Its resemblance in important particulars to that of Jesus is remarkable. Even the name, Crishna (or Chrishna), has a familiar sound. Miraculously born, he is a worker of miracles ; a teacher of pure morality, again to return, and judge the earth. Vishnu has been incarnated eight times, and, to complete the cycle of duration, has twice more to appear. The eighth incarnation in the form of Crishna is held the most sacred ; though devotees are divided in their opinions, some holding that the seventh, under the name of Rama, should receive more devotion.

The Brahmans date the former before the Cali Yug, or more than five thousand years ago. The Bhagavat Geeta, which contains an account of the wonderful earth-life of the god, is supposed to have been written fourteen hundred and fifty-one years before Christ.*

Its language is highly figurative and poetic. The earth was so oppressed by the dominion of evil spirits,

* Sir William Jones.

that, unable to endure the suffering they inflicted, she appeared before Indra, who referred her to Siva, who in turn sent her to Vishnu. Having, in company with her, consulted the oracle of Brahma, the latter was informed by the Invisible that he must become a man under the name of Crishna. To this, Vishnu answered, "I will become incarnate in the house of Yader, and will issue forth to mortal birth from Devaci. It is time I should display my power, and relieve the oppressed earth from its load."

Devaci was sister to a king ; and her husband was a Brahman, by the name of Vasudeva, descended from one of the most ancient and noble lines in India. Returning from their wedding, Cansa, the king, heard a voice saying, "The eighth son of Devaci is destined to be thy destroyer." Greatly disturbed, he locked them both up in a strong prison having seven iron doors ; and, whenever a son was born to them, he caused it to be destroyed. (When she conceived the eighth time, her countenance became radiantly beautiful. Brahma and Siva, with countless hosts of attendant spirits, came to her, and sang, "In thy delivery, O favored among women ! all nations shall have cause to exult. How ardently we long to behold the face for the sake of which we have coursed around three worlds !"

Nature sympathized with the miraculous birth. Her preceding seasons were remarkably regular. The winds slept ; the rivers hushed. At midnight, when the birth was taking place, the clouds emitted low music, and poured down a rain of flowers. The

celestial child was greeted with hymns by attending spirits: the room was illuminated by his light, and the countenances of his father and mother emitted rays of glory. They recognized God, the preserver, and bowed in worship.

Their minds were soon closed; and they saw only their infant, soon to be snatched from them by the servants of the merciless king. As his mother wept over him, a voice was heard, "Son of Yadar, carry this child to Gokul, on the other side of the river Jumna, to Nanda, whose wife has just given birth to a daughter. Leave him, and bring the girl hither." Vasudeva, on asking how he could pass the guarded walls, again heard the voice saying, "The doors will open of themselves; and I have caused a deep sleep to fall on all the guards." He took the infant in his arms, and the doors opened before him. When he reached the river, it was swollen by the rains of the season; but, when the divine child approached, the waters arose to kiss his feet, then respectfully retired, and allowed them to pass along a dry pathway. The door of Nanda's house opened of itself. Vasudeva found him and his wife asleep, and exchanged the infants. On his return, the waters of the river again parted, and the prison-doors opened.

The midnight flight with the babe is sculptured on the walls of ancient temples.

Having long wished for a son, Nanda was delighted by at length finding one so beautiful sleeping by his wife, and named him Crishna, in allusion to his bluish-black color.

The child soon attracted attention by miracles. While attending the herds with his foster-father, a great serpent poisoned the river ; and the cows and shepherd-boys, having drank, lay on the banks dead. Crishna, by a look, restored them to life, and afterwards destroyed the serpent. The herds and attendants having been stolen, Crishna, by a simple exertion of his will, created others so like them that no one could perceive any difference.

Astonished by these wonderful actions, men told Nanda that he could not be his son, but must be a god. "Yes," he replied ; "it must be so. When I named him Crishna, on account of his color, the priest told me he must be the god who had taken different bodies — red, white, yellow, and black — in his different incarnations ; and now he had assumed a black color again, since in black all colors are absorbed."

Indra, penetrating the disguise, threw herself at the feet of the wonderful child, praying for pardon for his presumption ; while the Ginarers and Gandharvas threw down showers of flowers, the leaves burst forth from the trees, and the waters of the river rose, throwing forth rubies and diamonds.

Cansa acted the part fifteen centuries afterwards played by Herod. Informed that the child he had so strenuously sought to destroy was born and living, he ordered all children throughout his kingdom to be slain. In the cave temple of Elephanta, this deed is recorded in stone, by the symbol of a sword surrounded by slaughtered infants.

Finding this cruel mandate ineffectual, he sent a special messenger to effect his purpose. The messenger found Crishna on the banks of the river, and, on approaching, saw his shadow, with innumerable spirits, with joined hands, in adoration. With them he united in worship. "O thou Supreme One, thy essence is inscrutable; but its shadow is in all bodies, like the image of the sun reflected in vases of water. If the vase is broken, where is the image? Yet the sun is neither incased by the vases, nor diminished by their fracture. In like manner, thou art all in all. The understanding of finite man cannot reach thy almighty power. Well may it escape the sight of myself, and other mortals who are a prey to earthly desires, when the mightiest spirits, even Brahma and Siva, are lost in astonishment. I, who know nothing, fly to thee for protection. Show mercy upon me, and enable me to see and know thee."

Crishna, observing his amazement, asked the cause; and the messenger replied, "O sovereign Lord, thou well knowest what I have seen in the water." Then the divine child smiled, and went his way.

Around him gathered myths and legends characteristic of the early ages of mankind. The imagination, intensified by religious contemplation, has enrobed its ideal god-man with rainbow drapery. He knew the most secret thoughts of his associates, and could detect evil spirits under any guise. A terrible bull was sent to destroy him; but he calmly

said, "I know what evil spirit thou art in disguise. If any disease makes thee thus frantic, I will cure thee." Then, as the fiery beast came at him, he seized him by the horns, and twisted his head from his body.

He is described as perfectly beautiful ; and poetic fancy revels in extolling his manly proportions and graceful outlines. Women left their work to gaze at him as he passed. His intercourse with the Gopias is considered allegorical, and connected with the mysterious fructifying powers of nature, and, though grossly sensual to the European, is contemplated with pure and holy feelings by the Hindoo. There is a distinct antagonism between the East and the West in their views of the delicacy or indelicacy of the mysterious functions of generation ; and, it must be confessed, the comparison is against Western prudishness.

The fame of Crishna was borne to Cansa ; and he sought to entice him to his palace, that he might destroy him. He avoided all the snares of the tyrant and the evil spirits until he knew the predestined time for him to destroy his enemy had come. Then he attacked him, tore the crown from his head, and dragged him on the ground. In death, he obtained reward for his constant thoughts of the god ; for whoever, either in love or hate, unceasingly contemplates the incarnate deity, at death is released of the three worlds. As he was dragged on the ground by Crishna, he, at the moment of death, had beatific visions, and was liberated.

Comforting the relatives of the king, Crishna repaired to the prison where his father and mother were confined, and, falling at their feet, he said, "Be happy in the life of that son for whose sake his earthly parents have suffered so much danger and distress."

Then they knew him to be the Almighty, and worshiped him: but, in a moment after, he closed their eyes; for he had a great work yet to do, and it was necessary that his incarnation should not be recognized.

His parents, as his youth had been passed among shepherds, at once employed a learned Brahman, of the caste of rajahs to which he belonged, to teach him the knowledge required. In one day and night, he had learned the complete circle of the sciences; but, for appearance, he remained with his tutor.

On parting, he told him to ask for whatever he chose; and the Brahman wished above all things for his two sons who were dead. Crishna assured him that they should be restored. He descended to the abode of the departed; and, summoning the god of the dead, he demanded the young men. His commands were at once obeyed; and he brought them to their overjoyed father. He was constantly performing miracles. He lulled tempests, cured lepers, and renewed the youth of the aged. Although often exerting force against oppression, his boundless kindness freely extended to all. At the same moment he visited rajahs who offered him gold and pearls, and the humble sheds of devout Brahmans who

offered him nothing but fruits and flowers. He gave none preference.

Bhreegoo, a celebrated saint, doubting his divinity, kicked him. Crishna stooped to examine his boot, saying, "This breast of mine is extremely hard: you surely must have hurt yourself." The saint wept for joy, exclaiming, "This must indeed be the true Lord of the three worlds."

He strictly obeyed the injunctions of the Vedas; attended prayers, washed the feet of Brahmans, and neglected none of the required purifications which were required on account of his material nature. He lived in sumptuous style, worthy of a god: a Hindoo could not connect the divine with anything mean or of low caste.

The father-in-law of Cansa had sworn revenge for his death, and attacked the city of Matra. "Crishna, to save the inhabitants from all danger, called up an island from the ocean, and transported them all thither. By his command, Visvakarma, the architect of his celestial paradise, constructed a wonderful city, called Dwarka. The walls were of gold, and the pavements glittered with precious stones. The houses were of pure crystal, supported by pillars of coral, with canopies of golden cloth, festooned with strings of pearl. The apartments were illuminated with resplendent rubies, and over the roofs floated clouds of fragrant smoke from constantly burning aromatics. Numerous temples towered towards the sky; and the incense from their altars perfumed the whole atmosphere. Learned Brahmans everywhere

chanted the Vedas. Peacocks sported among the trees, and nightingales sang. In the garden was a river whose banks were all gold and jewels. It appeared red from the reflection of rubies, but it was perfectly white. It was the water of life."

Thus, fifteen hundred years before the apostles' time, the "New City," the "New Jerusalem," was portrayed in language of which the Apocalypse is a weak imitation.

The end of the Avatar drawing nigh, nature forboded the great event. A black circle surrounded the moon, and the sun was darkened at noonday. There was fiery rain; and, at sunrise and sunset, shadowy hosts skirmished in the air, and hovering spirits wailed, "Arise ye, and flee!" The horse of Crishna took fright, and rushed into the trackless regions of the atmosphere. He knew that his exit from the mortal frame drew nigh. A prophecy had said, "O Crishna, take care of the sole of thy foot." While meditating in the forest, a hunter, mistaking him for a wild beast, discharged an arrow at him, which pierced his foot. Immediately a great light illuminated the heavens. Crishna, with attending spirits, radiant as sunlight, pursued his path from earth to the bright paradise from which he had descended. All men saw, and exclaimed, "Lo! Crishna's soul ascends to its native skies."

Throughout India, he is worshiped with enthusiastic devotion, and to him is ascribed all the wisdom of the Almighty; for he was a perfect incarnation. He is called the "Pardoner of Sins," and "Liberator

from the Serpent of Death." In the ancient temples, he is sculptured, either wreathed in the folds of a serpent, which is biting his foot, or treading victoriously on its head.

Crishna, in the Bhagavat Geeta, is made to say, "I am the creation and the dissolution of the whole universe. There is nothing greater than I. All things hang on me, even as precious gems on a string. . . . I am all things: I am life. I am the eternal seed of nature. He who adores with a sincere faith, any object whatsoever, infallibly obtains from me the object of his belief. Firm in his faith, he seeks by his own means such or such a favor, and I grant the object of his desire. . . . The ignorant believe me visible while I am invisible. They do not know my superior imperishable nature. I am animated with equal benevolence towards all beings. I know neither hatred nor predeliction; but those who adore me devoutly are in me, and I in them. Even he who has led a bad life, if he adore me without adoring any other thing, is to be reputed virtuous. He will immediately have a just soul, and obtain eternal tranquillity. No one who worships me can perish. Have faith in me, — address thyself to me as the only asylum: I will deliver thee from sin."

Complete as the eighth incarnation is regarded, the tenth and last is to be more glorious. When the fixed stars apparently return to the point from which they set out at the beginning, Vishnu will appear as a warrior on a white horse, his cimeter blazing like a comet, and declare the circle of ages completed,

and the end of all things consummated. Then from his thousand mouths the Great Serpent shall pour forth streams of which shall ignite the universe. Some oriental scholars interpret this as an astronomical allegory ; but it undoubtedly is a myth, dating two ages before the facts of astronomy, to which it applies, were known.

The last coming of Vishnu in power and glory, to consummate the final overthrow of evil, sin, and death, is so firmly fixed in the minds of the devotees, that they have an annual festival in commemoration of the prophecy of the same, at which they repeat, with a loud voice, "When will the Helper come? when will the Deliverer appear?" *

Buddhism was a re-action against Brahmanism. Conflicting as are the dates of Buddha's advent, nothing certain can be stated farther than that he flourished at least one thousand years before our era. He was one of those great and active souls that appear through the centuries, laboring with resistless energy against old abuses that have culminated. Like them, he is deified, and worshiped by grateful followers ; and, as the ages pass, the veil of fiction more and more conceals the reality of his life.

He was born of a virgin, Maia, who conceived by a ray of the sun. Although he taught equality, in contradistinction from caste, his disciples were not content until they made the husband of Maia a rajah ; and thus Buddha, like Crishna, of royal caste. He is believed to have been an incarnation of the

* Bhagavat Dasam Askand.

Eternal One. At his birth, a marvelous light illumined the earth ; the Ganges rose and fell ; and in a moment he stood upright, and claimed adoration. He became in early manhood a hermit, and inflicted the most cruel punishments on himself. He did this out of compassion for the sins of others, for which he thus atoned. From pure compassion, he left paradise, and sought to lead men to better paths, and lives of virtue and rectitude. He gave them the example of a noble and well-spent life, devoted to mercy and charity. He suffered to atone for the sins of the world ; and the sinner, through faith in him, can be saved.

So perfect did he become, that he was absorbed into the divine nature, completely cast off the earthly part, and ascended, without dying, to the sphere of the Eternal One.

Buddhism resembles Brahmanism, from which it sprang, and on which it is a reform. It is parallel to Christianity in its relations to Judaism.

Brahmanism and Judaism were both exclusive, and fettered by the prejudice of caste. Christ and Buddha both taught the equality of man. The success of the two reforms, in point of numbers, is about the same. Such a parallel may shock the prejudice of a Christian : it would painfully affect a devotee of Buddha.

Living in an age when every occurrence is scrutinized in the most vigorous manner, and thought promulgated by telegraph and press, bringing the whole world *en rapport*, we can scarcely identify

ourselves with the ages out of which the god-men sprang.

In the absence of the press, the masses are necessarily ignorant, and hence superstitious. Men with "missions" in them find ready followers, who are devoted in exact ratio of their ignorance.

The ease with which they are imposed upon by the self-deluded and designing was illustrated in India, in 1829. Marayun Powar, the son of a peasant, at the age of eight, became famous as a serpent-charmer. He would go out into the fields, and call them ; twist them around his body, limbs, and neck ; fondle, chastise, or send them away. It was a belief, descended from the ancient anchorites, that the proof of their becoming perfectly holy, and absorbed in God, was the handling of serpents without harm. It was also prophesied, in olden times, that a person would arise, and redeem Hindostan from the yoke of bondage. The friends of Powar, with many Brahmans, believed, or pretended to believe, that he was a god. They eagerly caught the wandering words that fell from his lips, and held they taught his divine mission. They called him the holy one, and finally the "living god." Then they began to baptize, and perform miraculous cures. In ten months, ten thousand pilgrims attended him.

What would have been the result of this delusion, it is difficult to predict, had not death cut short the young god's life, and dissipated the visions of his followers. He attempted to handle a serpent brought by a pariah from Benares, and was bitten. His fol-

lowers predicted that he would arise on the third day; then that he certainly would on the eighth. After vainly waiting, they dispersed; but it was rumored that he had been seen in various places. The disappointment of their hopes re-acted on the minds of his enthusiastic disciples; and they were firmly convinced that he was an incarnate demon, commissioned to lead men astray. Had he lived, and taken the proper measures, another incarnation, or divinity, would have been added to the Hindoo pantheon, and another religion started on an unknown career in their vast empire.

The innovation of Lamaism attained almost the strength of its parent. Its origin is as wonderful as its sway is absolute. A hermit from India establishes himself on a mountain in Thibet, and his ardent followers soon believe him to be Buddha. Two hundred years after, Srougosan Gambo established himself on the sacred mountain, and erected the city of Lassa. His followers believed that they saw in him the holy hermit returned to human form, to establish, on a lasting basis, the religion he loved. On this foundation, rests the stupendous structure of Lamaism, to which hundreds of millions of people abjectly bow.

The spread of Buddhism into China was attended with miraculous events, and the fulfillment of a prophecy over a thousand years old. Tchao Wang was surprised by a light from the southwest; and, summoning his sages, they, by reference to their sacred books, found that such a light should appear

when a great saint was born in the west, and a thousand years thereafter his religion should spread into China. This was a thousand and twenty-nine years before Christ. In the year sixty-five, the Emperor Ming-ti was warned by a dream, and, on consulting the annals, found its correspondence with the prophecy. Deeply impressed, he sent ambassadors to India, who, meeting the followers of Buddha Sakia, brought back his sacred books and some of its priests. At the end of five centuries, he had three thousand temples.

The Chinese have not only a redeemer, but also a mother-goddess. In the review of the incarnations, the father is seldom met. He is persistently kept in the background ; but the mother is brought prominently forward, and endowed with divine character. They share in the glories of their illustrious sons, and are often deified. Mary, the virgin mother, has more worship than the son himself. Maia partook of the divine nature. The Chinese mother-goddess most perfectly resembles the Virgin Mary. Her image is almost universal. She is represented with a glory surrounding her head, and a babe in her arms. Her divine son was conceived by contact of a water-lily. He was at first exposed to great dangers, but was reared by a poor fisherman, and is concealed by a silken veil.

Confucius taught at least six centuries before Christ ; and Zoroaster was far more remote. The dates by cities differ so widely that it has been suggested with great probability that there were two

personages of that name. The Zend was a dead language in the time of Artaxerxes ; and Herodotus speaks of the Persian sage as though his birth was lost in the night of time. The sacred Zendavesta was probably collected from various sources during the period when the race speaking its language flourished, and is not the work of a single author. Zoroaster, perhaps, acted as compiler ; and, in more recent times, another writer gave the collection a finishing review. The doctrines it contains have excited uncontrolled influence over mighty nations. The Persian kings, when holding empire of the world, bowed to its mandates ; and, absorbed by the Hebrew mind, they have descended in many wild dreams of the Christian Church.

Zoroaster, the god-man of the Persians, was attended by miracles from his birth. Evil spirits sought to destroy him ; but good spirits came to his rescue. The former threw him into the flaming fire, where his mother found him sweetly sleeping. For twenty years he lived in the wilderness : then he retired to a lonely mountain, and devoted himself to contemplation. There, in flaming clouds of fire, Ormuzd gave him the book of laws, the holy Zendavesta. When he wished to die, he invoked the spirit of the constellation Orion, and was consumed by celestial fire. He is called the "Just Judge." The Zendavesta, or living word, contains maxims worthy any age, as the following extracts will show : "Do not allow yourself to be carried away by anger. Reply to thine enemy with gentleness. Avoid every-

thing calculated to injure others. Take not that which belongs to another. Be not envious, avaricious, proud, nor vain. To refuse hospitality, and not succor the poor, are sins. Be scrupulous to observe the truth in all things. Fornication and immodest looks are sins. To think evil is a sin: strive, therefore, to keep pure in body and mind. Every man who is pure in thought, words, and actions, will go to the celestial regions. Every man who is evil in thoughts, words, or actions, will go to a place of punishment."

To illustrate the certainty with which the human mind, when in like circumstances and on similar planes of development, reproduces like ideas, from the plains of Asia let us pass to the other side of the globe, and question an unknown people, completely isolated from the great races of whom we have spoken. The Aztec, or ancient Mexican, had attained the highest degree of civilization of any people on the Western Continent. They had reached the extent of their capabilities, and had already begun to decline, when conquered by the Spaniards. Brief as was their career, they had elaborated a complex system of theology. They recognized one supreme god ; but the idea of unity, of one being who needed no inferior to execute his purposes, was too vast for their understanding.

From the contemplation of the Omnipresent, wearied, they sought relief in his incarnation. They found in Huitzilopotchli, chief of the gods, all their hearts desired. By his human nature, he became

approachable ; and the eyes of the devotee, dazzled by the blaze of light from the Infinite One, rested with joy on a god born of woman.*

His mother was a devout person, who, while attending the temple, saw a ball of bright-colored feathers floating in the air, which she caught, and placed in her bosom. She soon found herself the mother of the god who came into the world with a spear in his right hand, a shield in his left, and a crest of plumes on his head.

Splendid temples were erected to him ; and he received the most unbounded admiration, from one extreme of the Aztec empire to the other, and annually on his altars human hecatombs were sacrificed in all the great cities.

This terrible god did not, however, fully satisfy the Aztec heart ; and Quetzalcoalt was introduced with still more human attributes. Out of pure benevolence and love he came, and dwelt among mankind. He instructed them in the use of metals, in agriculture, and government. He brought the golden age of Mexico. The perfumed air was filled with melody : the earth teemed with fruits and grain, which matured without culture ; the cotton, as it grew, became of most beautiful colors ; and all nature seemed designed to afford the greatest pleasure to mankind. But all glory fades ; and the kaleidoscopic lives of the gods form no exception. He incurred the wrath of one of the superior deities,

* Clavigero. Stor. del Messico, quoted by Prescott, Conquest of Mexico.

and was expelled the empire. The Aztecs looked confidently for his return, and mistook Cortez for their long-expected god,—a blind faith which worked their ruin.

Alas! were the beneficent Quetzalcoalt to return, he would find his beloved children vanished from the earth; and, in their place, a bastard Spanish race, worshiping another Quetzalcoalt, who died on a cross, and the beautiful simplicity of the old faith destroyed by the trappings of ignorance and bigotry.

III.

JESUS OF NAZARETH. THE PROPHECIES OF THE MESSIAH.

The Bible—it is like wax: you can stretch and mold it any way that you please.

THE Hebrew prophets held that the Messiah would certainly come, and as a king, to deliver the oppressed nation of God from bondage, and reign over the earth. This was taught in the school of Hillel, by Philo, and the Essenes.

The prophet to be raised up, spoken of in Deuteronomy, as applied to Jesus, is far-fetched; and the prophecies of Isaiah, though more pointed, seem to be dictated by the spirit which has animated the poets of all ages to describe in rhapsodical measure the glories of the golden age. The prophecies of Daniel, with an ambiguity worthy of any oracle, may relate to Jesus; but these prophecies, if relating to Jesus at all, speak of him as a temporal ruler. The Messiah would be a visible manifestation of Jehovah, who had promised to David, through the Prophet Nathan, that he would establish his family on the throne forever. With almost his last words, David alluded to the promise; and Solomon, when he dedicated the temple, reminded Jehovah of his cove-

nant. The brilliant period of Hebrew history began with David ; and all their hopes for the future were entwined with his house and tribe. Out of it they constantly expected the "lion of the tribe of Judah ;" and in the darkest hours of their captivity, burdened and oppressed, their eyes were steadily turned in that direction, in expectation of a deliverer. No prophecy in the annals of the world ever exerted an equal influence.

While the religion of the Jews decayed, one great idea remained,—the coming of a new order of things, a heavenly kingdom, believed to be close at hand. The sacred books taught that God had always been faithful : they could not believe themselves deserted. The duty of every true Hebrew was to consider it possible for the Messiah to appear in himself.

Every pretender that arose was eagerly sought ; for there was ever the possibility of his being the promised one. As the nation felt more and more severely the strong arm of Roman power, and the general decay of their institutions, they became more intensely excited in regard to the advent of their deliverer. The great prophets, whom none called in question, had spoken the mandate of Jehovah ; and his beloved nation, chastened, but not forsaken, under the leadership of the Messiah, would be called to the throne of the world. The discouragements around them were rather in favor than against this belief ; because, when God ordered, the powers of Babylon or Rome were as nothing. The miracles would be the more conspicuous.

The anxiety became intense. If God came not as of old, national ruin and death would inevitably come. Judea was an undiscernable speck on the map of the Roman Empire. With God, she was all-powerful; without him, nothing.

Out of the seething waters, agitated by the conflict of races, and the contention of new thought, confined and stifled by the old, came the brood of pretenders born from the dissolution. Samaria was a hot-bed from which sprang the most celebrated. Simon, spoken of in the New Testament, performed greater miracles than those recorded of Jesus; and his numerous disciples received him as "the image of the eternal Father manifested in the flesh." The great influence he exerted during his lifetime was increased by his death; and the wild oriental doctrines he taught, through various sects, disturbed the quiet of the Christian churches for centuries. He founded his pretensions on the same base that Jesus did his: "the laws of nature obeyed his commands."

How excitable were the people is shown by their reception of John the Baptist. He came out of the wilderness, crying, with a loud voice and wild gestures, that the kingdom of heaven was at hand; and throngs of people followed him, ready to be prepared by baptism for the reception of the coming of the Lord. Not a spiritual deliverer, but a temporal king, they sought; and the prophecies promised them a ruler, surpassing, in wisdom and magnificence, the fabulous portraits of the great Solomon.

There is no prophecy of a spiritual deliverer, and

hence none relating to Christ. It is claimed that the Old Testament contains clear and distinct prophecies of Jesus. The evangelists so understood, and his followers to the present have fortified their position by quotations. If the Bible, according to the rabbins, have seventy-two meanings, perhaps one can be wrung from the prophecies favorable to their theory; but, in the plain sense of the writers, there is not a passage in the Old Testament that has any reference to Christ.

The prophecies so frequently quoted originated during a period of great depression. After the glorious age of David and Solomon, the Hebrew nation divided into the two tribes and the ten. The former were first swept into exile, and the latter were held captive at Babylon. The Jews were a pious people. They were filled with devotion to Jehovah. They confidently prayed to him in their darkest hour, humbly accepting their misery as a just punishment for their sins. They were certain that the God of their fathers had not deserted them; and, the darker the hour, the stronger their expectation. A deliverer, a Messiah, would come, and gather the scattered Jews at Jerusalem. He was invested with the airy raiment of poesy. He was great and good,—an ideal. The divided tribes would be united, and an eternal kingdom founded, from which idolatry would be banished, Jehovah reconciled to his people, and perfect peace and happiness reign. Jerusalem would be the capital of the world, and surrounding nations would bow in reverence to the Jewish name.

The pomp and grandeur of Solomon would be surpassed ; and the Mosaic law, throned on an eternal base, prevail in all its austere purity.

Did Christ meet the requirements of these prophecies? Nothing promised has been fulfilled. The ten tribes have vanished from the earth ; the two have no kingdom. The Messiah looked for by the Jews has not come, as they truly say. He never will come. They were intently expecting his coming two thousand years ago, but they could not receive Christ. Prejudiced in his favor, with him constantly, they could not see that he possessed extraordinary endowments. The expected saviour was a temporal king : the kingdom of Christ was not of this world. Jesus was slow to apply the prophecies to himself, and did not until forced to do so by the pressure of events.

IV.

CONCEPTION AND GENEALOGY.

Of all born of woman, no one has appeared like him. He represented, not a class, nor an age, but humanity in its highest form. — FURNESS.

Jesus was from eternity destined to become the Messiah and Saviour of the world. — HASE.

THE Church has in every age received the passages relating to the birth and death of Jesus in their literal signification. These passages admit of no other interpretation. It were useless to urge the impossibility of such conception against those who regard everything as possible with God. The dogma, like an inverted pyramid, rests on the exceedingly small apex of a few texts. Strange to say, that in no other portion of the testament is there an allusion to this manner of birth! nor does his mother anywhere betray a knowledge of his supernatural origin.

It is necessary that his parentage be divine, or his birth fails to meet its requirement. If he is to be a mediator, and his blood to atone for the sins of the world, he must have a divine origin.

It was early seen that even the divine fatherhood did not save Jesus from sin by the mother. This necessity was recognized by the authors of the

apocryphal Gospels, and they strive to supply the missing links. They relate stranger things about the birth of Mary than the synoptics about that of Jesus. With a divine mother and father, the divinity of the child was perfect.

Again the human mind turned in its accustomed circle ; and we are ready to exclaim, " Must history ever be the chronicle of the re-appearance of ideas ? and shall it never find a new, an original thought ? "

The mother of Buddha, by a ray of light ; the mother of Crishna, by the direct influence of the god ; the mother of Quetzalcoalt was deceived by fying feathers ; the mother of Plato, by Apollo. The mother of Æsculapius, who was remarkably beautiful, not only conceived him by Apollo, but the condescending god appeared to her husband, and commanded him to respect her maternity. Socrates was informed in a dream of the advent of Plato ; and the life of Zoroaster was a constant succession of miracles.

If the advent of heathen gods and philosophers were thus heralded, would not that of Jesus be far more miraculous ? The Jews had no other god than Jehovah. If God became man, it must be the spirit of Jehovah, and none other.

These are beautiful legends, and allegorically represent the divine spirit residing in every human being. Not in Jesus or Buddha only, but in each and every one ; perhaps obscured, but always having the possibilities of blazing forth glorious and strong.

Not only did the prophets speak of a Messiah, but

that Messiah was to be born of a virgin. Joseph, according to the apocryphal Gospels, was an old man, and, espousing Mary, he found her already with child. He did not wish to make an example of her, and was greatly troubled in mind. His doubts were assuaged by a dream, wherein an angel of the Lord appeared, and told him the child was of the Holy Ghost, and that he would save his people from their sins. This story is founded on the prophecy of Isaiah, of which it is an admirable paraphrase.

Luke, not having this prophecy in mind, relates the story very differently. He says the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, and told her that she was to bear a son, who should rule forever over the house of Jacob, and the father should be the Holy Ghost. She at once repairs to her Cousin Elizabeth's, and is made to sing a hymn,—very pretty, but very unnatural. The unborn John the Baptist is made to recognize the embryonic Saviour of the world at the meeting of their consecrated mothers.

These two accounts are in direct conflict, and only one can be received. Joseph doubts, and, according to Matthew, an angel comes to dispel his doubts. Luke says nothing about this, but the angel appears to Mary herself. Luke has the example of Sara before him; Matthew, a prophecy. Both stories are founded on false interpretations of prophecy. The passage quoted, according to the best critics, simply meant that the enemies of Ahaz would be destroyed before a child then conceived should be born; or a figure of speech expressive of

time. It had a local application, and no more. Of course narratives founded on a mistake must be mistaken.

The *Spiritus Dei* descended on Mary; and the result was not accomplished by physical means, but by divine creative energy.

The veneration for Mary increased from generation to generation, until it became a heresy to believe that she had children by Joseph after the birth of Christ. The orthodox fathers considered Joseph as very old, and only the protector of Mary; and the brothers of Jesus, children by a former marriage. It was claimed that Mary, by the birth of Jesus, did not lose her virginity. This repugnance to matter went so far, that Jerome, with whom it culminated, declared the perpetual chastity of Joseph: the brothers of Jesus were only cousins.

The virginity of Mary was necessary from the evil of matter; but was repugnant to the Jews, who held maternity to be the greatest blessing, and had no thought that the body was sinful. Learned rabbis denied that the prophecies said the Messiah was to be born of a virgin, but simply of a young woman; and they ridiculed the idea of the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus, asking why, if Mary gave birth to a god, there was need of her going to the temple for purification. In after centuries, when the virginity was more intimately connected with the incarnation, and Jesus became a member of the trinity, or as God himself, their opposition became still more bitter. They were opposed to the trinity, because it

introduced three gods in place of Jehovah, and their great Law-giver had pronounced a dreadful curse on them if they ever received any other god than him. They affirmed (and who could interpret them better?) that the prophets did not predict that the Messiah was to be a god-man, but a man like other men. The trinity formed an obstacle insurmountable to them until it became veiled in technical verbiage.

BIRTH OF JESUS.

A century after his advent, men sat down to compare narratives of the life of Jesus. They gathered the legends floating in the minds of his followers, and were aided by fragmentary writings. The writers were his adherents, and wrote for the benefit of their cause.

Beginning at his birth, they asked, Could that have been a natural event? Their minds, filled with the hero-worship of antiquity, answered, No. They believed him the promised Messiah; and, having imbibed oriental ideas of the sinfulness of matter, they asked, Could the Divine be contaminated by the unholy passions? Impossible! The advent of ordinary heroes of antiquity were heralded by miracle. If the husband of the mother of Plato held her too sacred to approach; if the god had commanded the husband of the mother of Æsculapius to respect her condition,—should Joseph approach Mary, the recipient of the favor of the Almighty One? The story of the divine conception was necessary.

His lowly birth was a part of the same ever-recurring myth. It was supposed that husbandmen and shepherds, by their contact with nature, came in closer relations to the gods than ordinary men. All the hero-gods of antiquity are connected with the lower walks of the people. The Persian king, Astyages, has a dream about his daughter that foreshadowed the birth of Cyrus the Great. He attempts to destroy the child; but it is brought up by a herdsman, and eventually ascends the throne. Moses is a waif, miraculously rescued. David, the great king, is from the people. Crishna was reared by a shepherd; and Romulus and Remus, by a wolf. Jesus was born in a manger, and became a carpenter.

HIS LINEAGE.

David was the ideal king of the Jews, and from him must proceed the king of their golden age. The authors of the Gospels are determined to make this point. Matthew says that Jesus himself declared his lineage (xxii. 42), and proves it by quoting a prophecy that has no application to him. The author of Acts is certain that even David foreknew the coming of Jesus to sit on his throne (ii. 25-31). In these passages, the writers only reflect the current belief of the Jews. Thus they argued: It is believed that these prophecies and events will be attributed to the Messiah: Jesus is the Messiah; hence these prophecies have been made in reference to him, and these events have occurred.

Two of the Gospels enter into detailed genealogies, — one giving an apparently correct catalogue of names from Jesus to David ; and another, more ambitious, extends his unbroken line to Adam. It would seem that these two catalogues should agree ; but, on the contrary, they contradict each other. Augustine, Julius Africanus, and others, sought, by the most far-fetched theories, to reconcile the conflicting statements, but completely failed. Matthew makes twenty-six generations between Jesus and David, while Luke has forty-one. The former evidently believes that three and seven are sacred numbers, and endeavors to trim the generations to suit his theory. There are fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonish exile, and fourteen from the latter to Jesus. The first two terms are made right by omissions ; the last contains but twelve generations.

Matthew drew from the Old Testament : but Luke diverges at the first term, — Heli, not Jacob, was the father to Joseph ; and he does not meet the other line until David, after which he follows the Old Testament to Abraham. Then he ambitiously proceeds, through a maze of Old-Testament names, to Adam and God. Is one of these the genealogy of Mary ? The writers declare both to be of Joseph ; and we are obliged to accept their word. Both cannot be true. They may destroy each other. The mystic numbers of Matthew destroy his reliability ; and the frequent recurrence of the same names in Luke casts over it the light of fiction. It is incredible that the

genealogy of an obscure family like Joseph's should be preserved with such care. They reveal their fictitious character on their face, and are of no historical value. The whole conception of the derivation of Jesus through the line of David, because that line was most sacred to God, is founded on a false belief. The house of David was no more sacred to God than that of an immigrant on the Western prairie ; and a son of that house no better than sons of ordinary families. Their object is plain : The Messiah must descend from David ; and, taking for granted that Jesus was the Messiah, the tables were constructed to prove his lineal descent from that king. They were written before the idea of other than natural conception had gained ground. The writers regarded him of natural parentage. In no other sense have the tables any meaning. If Joseph was not the father of Jesus, the latter being conceived by the *Spiritus Dei*, his genealogy, if ever so authentic, does not derive Jesus from the house of David. It is out of place in the Gospels, having no more relation to Jesus than to John the Baptist. The great care taken to construct a noble genealogy shows the firmness of their belief in human conception. It was adopted by the strong sect of Ebionites, established in Palestine. They believed his conception natural, and that the divine spirit fell on him at his baptism. Nowhere do the apostles declare such a belief erroneous ; but, rather, two of them acquiesce by adopting the tables.

Who are these writers ? We know not. The

two other Gospels, with Peter and Paul, do not mention the miraculous birth. They seem to take the contrary for granted.

Jesus was never reviled for his unlawful birth, which assuredly he would have been by the reproachful Jews.

The legend of a birth from a virgin expresses the idea of purity and divinity, and grew out of wrong interpretation of the prophecies connected with ideas of what the Messiah must necessarily be.

· THE HOLY FAMILY.

In the legends of the Church, Mary is represented as a perfect type of her sex, uniting what nature has eternally separated. Joseph is said to have been an old man, who simply held the office of protector to Mary. He had, by a former marriage, four sons and two daughters, spoken of in the Gospels as the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Partaking of the desire of the age, she may have imagined herself the divinely commissioned instrument of bringing the Messiah into the world. The rabbins taught that every Israelite, and especially every descendant of David, must wish to be the Messiah. Her mind might have been inflamed by the popular feeling, and, like many another mother, thought her son was brought into the world for a mission. This, however, is not probable; for, in the apostolic narratives, she evinces total ignorance of that mission, and does not show any indication

of being superior to the ordinary women who surrounded her.

The virgin mother and her babe is a myth derived from the Egyptian Horus, and, as painted by the heated fancy of the Christian devotee, has never had existence. The holy family is a myth of the same character, and derived from those of other races of antiquity.

V.

BIRTH AND YOUTH OF JESUS.

According to the faith of Christendom, God becomes man in Christ, and thereby procures the salvation of the world. — HASE.

THE first Gospel says that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, implying that it was his native city. His birth was announced by prodigies. A star not only indicated to the wise men of the East that a great king of the Jews was born, but guided them on their journey to pay him their devotions. They were commanded by Herod to secure the child concerning whom they uttered such prophecies ; but after worshiping, warned by a dream, they departed to their own country.

Then an angel appeared to Joseph, and bade him depart for Egypt ; for Herod would seek to destroy the child. Immediately afterwards, Herod slew all the children, two years old and under, in Bethlehem and the coast thereof. After Herod's death, Joseph again dreamed, the Lord commanding his return ; but, being fearful of the ruler of Judea, he went to Galilee, and dwelt in the City of Nazareth.

According to Luke, Nazareth is the dwelling-place of Joseph and Mary, and he says they went up to Bethlehem to be taxed. There Christ was laid in a

manger. The wise men came not ; their place being supplied in a more antique manner. Out on the broad plains, silently watching their flocks, and gazing on the stars, were a band of shepherds. The glory of the Lord shone round them ; and the voices of angels spake that a Saviour, a Christ, was born ; and hosts of assembled spirits sang praises to God.

The shepherds repaired hastily to the abode of Joseph and Mary, worshiped the infant Saviour, and praised God. This is a beautiful poem, comparing well with similar strains in the life of Buddha. The writer of the former, with artless simplicity, exposes the object he has in view by its narration. Herod destroys the infants to fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah ; and Joseph turns aside into Galilee to fulfill another prophecy, that he should be called a Nazarene.

Critics have been perplexed by the latter prophecy, as it was never made, at least not in any book which descended to the fathers ; but the queries which arise on considering these extraordinary stories present still greater difficulties. Who were these wise men from the East ? They seemed well acquainted with the Hebrew prophecies, and believers in the prevailing idea of the coming of the Messiah. How did they know what the star indicated ? The story is indicative of Jewish conceit, which took for granted that all nations were familiar with their exalted beliefs. The subtle Herod gave these strangers a desperate commission, and that too when their intentions were wholly unknown to him ; and,

when they did not return, he destroyed all the children of a certain age. While the child could have been so easily dispatched by a trusty messenger, and this wholesale slaughter avoided, why should he have chosen the bloody expedient? The answer is given by the silence of all contemporary historians. Josephus gives a tediously prolix account of Herod, but does not mention an occurrence which must have excited the indignation of the nation. It is not mentioned by any author until the fourth century, when Macrobius introduces it in a passage of the most unreliable character.

A belief extensively prevailed that a star was symbolical of the coming of the Messiah, and this introduced the star into the story. Again the myth rests on prophecy: "A star shall come out of Jacob." The rabbins teach that a star will appear in the east to herald the Messiah. It was believed, in common with the ancient world, that stars were connected with great events, and heralded their coming.

As the Jews held that a star was to precede the Messiah, it became necessary for the disciples to prove that he met this requirement. The prophecy passed into fact as soon as the birth became sufficiently remote. The star appeared. Who could interpret it but the celebrated magi of the East? They came, and worshiped; but, strange to say, they or the influence they exerted are never heard of afterwards. They acted an important part, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, that remotest kings and people should come to Jerusalem to worship, and

inflaming Herod to issue his murderous decree, and, playing it well, retired from the stage. The halo surrounding the birth of all great men obscured the writer's vision. Pharaoh decreed a similar slaughter as Herod to secure the death of Moses; and the infancy of Abraham, Cyrus, and Augustus, were surrounded by like perils. Nimrod was warned, by a star, of the birth of Abraham. To the writers of the Old and New Testaments, God was immanent in nature; and no event transpired without divine interference.

The flight of Moses *out* of Egypt furnished the model for the flight of Jesus into that country. The model is so closely followed, that the angel which appears to Joseph, telling him to return, uses the same words that the angel employed when he told Moses to return out of Midian.

It was necessary to send Jesus into Egypt to give significance to the prophecy of Hosea, — "Out of Egypt have I called my son." When Moses asked Pharaoh to allow him to depart from Egypt, he said to him that Israel was the first-born of God, and, if he did not grant his request, Jehovah would smite the first-born of Egypt. Hosea, referring to this, says, that, when Israel was a child, God loved him, and called him out of Egypt. The application of this passage to the flight to Egypt, by the parents of Jesus, is wholly unjustifiable.

Luke sets out with the supposition that Nazareth was the home of the holy family. It is necessary that they be brought to Bethlehem. Revolving

expedients in his mind, he seizes on the tax as an excuse for their going there. In this, he shows his utter ignorance of Roman law. The Jews required the people to gather to the cities to be taxed; but the Romans always went to the residence to levy the tax with justice. A Jewish tax would only have required Joseph to have gone to the city. Mary, in the condition she then was, was unfit for a journey. It was not a Jewish tax, but expressly Roman, and Augustus had decreed to tax the whole world. Unfortunately for the Gospel writer, the Roman Emperor never issued such a decree.

The light, with the angels who call the shepherds, are the elements of Luke's story; while the star and learned magi of the East form those of Matthew. Both are legends of unparalleled growth; for myths are protean, and change beneath the eye.

Matthew clearly implies Bethlehem to have been the home of Joseph. He goes to Nazareth, from Egypt, to fulfill a prophecy. Luke positively says that Nazareth was the home of Jesus, and the holy family went to Bethlehem to be taxed.

Thus the two authors not only contradict each other, but themselves. There is no more historical certainty in their narratives, than, in the wildest dreams of a Brahman, of the incarnation of Vishnu.

After forty days of purification, Jesus was brought to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord. At that time, Simeon, a prophet, and Anna, an aged prophetess, recognized in him the promised Messiah. This is a charming episode, and rounds out the narrative;

but is fatal to consistency, considered of first importance in biography.

The magi rendered the flight into Egypt necessary, and they could not have brought Jesus to Jerusalem after forty days. If Matthew and Luke were both inspired, how account for this vital discrepancy?

After the return from Egypt, all the Evangelists are silent until Jesus appears, in manhood, on the stage of action, except Luke, who gives the episode of the visit to the temple. Joseph and Mary, when Jesus was twelve years old, went up to the temple to the Passover, according to custom. After they had performed the necessary services, they returned; but, after a day's journey, they found Jesus still tarrying. They returned, and, after three days, found him in the temple, in the midst of the doctors, hearing them, and asking questions. His profound answers astonished all, and none more than his mother, who, amazed, asked him why he was there. His reply was that of a theologian centuries later.

This episode has received great attention, as it has been supposed to indicate the period when Jesus first felt the divine influence. It cannot have that meaning; and its origin can be easily seen by entering the channels of ancient thought. The twelfth year was the period appointed for boys to become independent participants in the sacred rites; and this was first performed at the Passover. The Jews regarded childhood as then passed, and expected the dawn of manhood at that age. Moses, Samuel, Dan-

iel, David, Solomon, first indicated their expertness in prophecy or government at twelve. The Messiah must give extraordinary evidence of his latent genius at that age. Although his mother had been told by an angel, before his birth, of his high office, she is amazed to find him in the temple, and at his answers. Was her mind, like that of the parents of Crishna, closed?

Had the birth of Jesus been accompanied with the miracles it is said to have been, at least his relatives would have entertained no doubt of his mission. On the contrary, they not only doubted his prophetic and Messianic powers, but also the soundness of his reason. The stories of the magi, and the confounding of the doctors, do not agree with such skepticism. At least his mother, who had received the ministration of angels, and had heard their prophecy of the glorious mission before her son, should have believed in him without the shadow of a doubt.

In the silence during the long interval of his history between his twelfth and thirtieth years, we may conjecture that Jesus was not unlike other young men. Tradition says that Joseph was a carpenter, and Jesus followed that occupation. His education is a subject for conjecture. His teachings were moral maxims; and it must be remembered that these are readily acquired from the ordinary walks of life. His condition must have been humble, or at least so regarded by the evangelists; for they make turtle-doves the offering presented at his consecration, — an offering allowable to the poor.

The date of his birth is entirely arbitrary, and was fixed at different times by the Church, which has celebrated it since the third century. The twenty-fifth of December was at length adopted, because it had already been celebrated from remotest antiquity, and its adoption by the pagan world thus made not only easy but welcome to the semi-pagan convert. Christmas is a pagan holiday.

The public life of Jesus is supposed to have 'been less than three years' duration. Some of the Church fathers, by misunderstanding Isaiah, supposed it was only one year; while others, as Irenæus, consider Jesus, in order to sanctify every period of human life, reached the mature age of fifty years.

Of the wonderful youth who confounded the doctors, nothing is recorded except that one instance. The writers of the apocryphal Gospels strive to bridge the void; and their wild legends show the credulity of an age that could originate such abnormal growths. Yet their resemblance to the canonical Gospels is marked; and the impartial reader must acknowledge that the difference is not in kind, but only in degree.

V I.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, AND HIS RELATIONS TO JESUS.

In those days, came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." — MATTHEW.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God. — ISAIAH.

Behold I send my messenger. — MALACHI.

THAT the Gospel narrative be a fulfillment of the prophecies in every particular, there must be a forerunner of the Messiah; and such forerunner was found in John the Baptist. In the condensed outline furnished by Mark, we have a glimpse of the singular process of reasoning by which John takes his place as a fulfillment of prophecy. The prophets have written, — I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make his path straight.

John did baptize in the wilderness; therefore he must be the promised forerunner. Again, the narrative grows out of the prophecy. The evangelist speaks of the Baptist only to introduce his peculiar doctrines; but, when Luke wrote, the legends had made a wonderful growth. Even the birth of John is surrounded with a halo of prodigy. It is the

counterpart of Christ's, with which it is made almost contemporary. An angel appeared to Zacharias in the temple, informing him that a son should be born to him in his old age; and he was struck dumb. The latter was the usual accompaniment of visions and visits of celestial beings. When eight days old, the child is brought for circumcision: its father regains his speech, and prophesies, giving a repetition of what has been already written about the forerunner and the Messiah. John and Jesus are connected by the ties of blood, and the sympathetic affection of their mothers, who support each other in their peculiar condition.

The next appearance of John is as a prophet, preaching in the wilderness, and baptizing the people; and his baptism of Jesus is the commencement of the public life of the latter. When the Nazarene went up out of the water, the heavens were opened, and the spirit of God descended on him as a dove, and a voice from heaven called him "My beloved son." John, already predisposed in Jesus' favor, should have had all doubts removed by this miracle: but he was not convinced; for, when in prison, he sent his disciples to ask him. And Jesus, fully persuaded of his divine office, and as completely misunderstanding the prophecies as his disciples, assured them that he was the promised one.

Was there such a man? There was a man, — one of the great number who sought the solitude of the wilderness, captivated by the oriental belief in the necessity of sacrificing this world to gain happiness

in the next. Stern men of wild devotion, dwelling in caverns, fasting and praying; coming out occasionally to give utterance to the unutterable thoughts engendered by their solitary contemplation of the savage wilderness. All nations regarded such men as closely related to the divine; and they wielded an irresistible influence over the multitude. He followed the example of the ancient prophets. An austere man, he rejected all the delicacies and amenities of social life. Clad in a single garment of camel's hair, tied around with a leathern girdle, supporting life on locusts and wild honey, he issued forth from the wilderness. Matted locks fell over his brawny shoulders; his long beard tangled over his hairy breast; his red eyes flashed with unearthly light from their dark and emaciated sockets; and, when he cried with a hoarse voice, "Repent," the awe-struck multitude trembled with fear. They asked, "Is this not the Messiah?" And the chief among them became excited, and sent a deputation to ask him if he were the Christ, or if they had yet longer to wait.

Whether an Essenian or not, he had deeply imbibed their spirit. How far he was carried by his enthusiasm, and how much of the prophetic fulfillment was attached to him after it became of importance, cannot be ascertained. The model existed ready formed in the Old Testament. The history of Abraham and Sara, the births of Samson and Samuel, had only to receive new names. There is a total absence of invention. The words of the angel

in regard to Samson are scarcely changed. Divine interference in causing conception is an important feature in the Bible, and forms the poetic element in the lives of a majority of its leading characters.

Josephus speaks of John, giving him essentially a historic character. He is simply a good man, commanding the Jews to piety, virtue, and baptism. His baptism was not for putting away the sins of the spirit, which was always pure, but for the purification of the body. He drew such multitudes that Herod became alarmed, thinking that he might raise an insurrection, and had him put to death.

When a Gentile was converted to Judaism, he was baptized; and the only innovation John seems to have made was declaring that the Jews themselves should be baptized. The purifying qualities of water have made it, among all peoples, an emblem of purity. It largely enters into all religious rites. The Hindoo supposes that it cleanses the soul when employed for that purpose. The new-born infant is sprinkled, the dying are plunged into the river, by the Brahmans, that thereby the departing spirit may be cleansed of its infirmities. Every twelfth year, they hold a great day of ablution, when vast concourses of people gather on the banks of the sacred river, and, at a signal from the presiding priest, plunge into the waves. The Catholic and Protestant churches have not advanced beyond the heathen myth.

Fire, the subtle flame that destroys the dross, and purifies the pure metal, must possess higher purify-

ing qualities than water. The immolation of the Hindoo widow redeems, not only her own, but her husband's, family from sin. The highest degrees of paradise were gained by saints who perished on funeral pyres. They became deified; and their devotees worshiped them by walking over burning coals. Sins requiring purification by fire, if not atoned for in this life, must be in the next. The Baptist alludes to these degrees of purification. He employs water; but the Messiah would purify with fire.

The Messiah came, and listened to the wild words of John, was converted, and, after the example of his master, betook himself to the wilderness. The episode of temptation is here met, which has received every possible explanation. He fasted and prayed until exhausted nature re-acted on the merciless spirit. He had a vague idea that he was the promised Christ; and naturally he asked himself why he had not power to create bread from stones, support himself in the air, and do other impossible things. A man, he had passions; and their voice is transformed to that of a devil. The order of the temptations shows the weakness of the myth. The first, offering bread to a man after a forty-days' fast, is well chosen; for, if anything would tempt him, it would be something to satisfy his hunger: but, not yielding, the Devil wants him to throw himself from the pinnacle of the temple, and see if the angels would support him. If bread would not tempt a starving man, Satan should have known that the project of breaking his bones would not. Last, both

these failing, the Devil, most improbable of all, makes the proposition that he worship him, thereby becoming an idolator, rather than which a Jew would suffer death.

Modern intelligence has discarded the existence of a god of evil; and of course the story of the temptation, resting as it does on that foundation, becomes a legend, and of no importance. Satan takes his place with Siva in mythology, and a new age expresses more precisely its conceptions of truth by saying man is tempted by his own passions.

VII.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

God appeared amongst men, and as man, to save that which is lost. In Jesus of Nazareth dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. —
D'AUBIGNE.

AFTER the temptation, Jesus, according to Matthew, went about all Galilee, teaching in the synagogues his peculiar doctrines. Having gathered a vast multitude, he went up into a mountain, and delivered the famous Sermon on the Mount. It is interesting as a compend of his teachings. He blesses poverty, the mourner, the meek, those who desire righteousness, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for the truth. He strenuously advocates the exact observance of the Mosaic law, and pronounces it an eternal code. He defines fraternal and connubial love. He forbids profanity. Although sanctioning the Mosaic code, and saying that he came not to destroy it, he did not endorse its iron maxims of an eye for an eye, but taught the exact opposite, — non-resistance to evil, to love enemies, to do good to those who despitefully use you. He presented the ideal perfection of the Father for imitation. He taught that alms, fasting, and prayer, should be made in secret. He discarded the treasures of earth, and eulogized

those of heaven. He commanded that no thought be taken of the morrow, presenting the fowls of the air and lilies of the field as illustrations. He taught a large and universal charity; to judge not, that you be not judged; to do as we would be done by. At the close, he intimates that he will hold the office of judge of the world in the final day.

Around this most important chapter in the Gospels gather the most impenetrable cloud of contradictions. Matthew says it was delivered on a mountain, and records one hundred and seven verses; while Luke says it was delivered on a plain, and records only thirty verses. Mark and John omit it altogether. It thus becomes doubtful whether Jesus ever made such a compend of his teachings. It is far more probable that his biographers gathered up his sayings, and threw them into that form after the manner of ancient historians, than that Jesus ever uttered such a discourse. Its doctrines are those of purest morality; but we must, however reluctantly, confess that in it no new truths were presented. It is old wine in new bottles; the reiteration of immemorial maxims. As an example, the Golden Rule is especially referred to Jesus, with what truth can be seen by consulting the sayings of preceding sages. Tobit said, "Do to no man what thou thyself hatest." And Hillel, "Do not to another what thou wouldst not he should do to thee: this is the sum of the law." Six centuries previously, Thales said, "That which thou blamest in another, do not thyself to thy neighbor." Pythagoras repeated this sen-

tence ; but Isocrates changed its wording : "Thou wilt deserve to be honored if thou doest not thyself what thou blamest in another." Still more remote, Confucius taught, "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others." Jesus said, "As ye would that men should do to you, do ye to them likewise."

The fatherhood of God was more vigorously received by the pagans than by the Christians. Hesiod and Homer call Jupiter, "Father of the gods and men." The Rig Veda says, "May the Father of men be favorable to us!" Horace speaks of the "Divine Father" of the human race ; and Seneca, of the "Glorious Parent." The pagan sages also taught the brotherhood of men. Epictetus, Quintillian, Aurelius, and Seneca speak of this relation. Diodorus says, "All men, everywhere, belong to one family." Menander says, "We have all one and the same nature." And Terence, "I am a man : nothing human can I count foreign to me." The Stoics completely anticipated the teachings of Jesus in regard to the brotherhood of man.

He uttered the doctrines of the Essenes, of whom, if he did not belong to that sect, he had imbibed all they had to teach.

They despised riches ; took no thought for the morrow ; swore not under any circumstances ; believed in being merciful, helping the needy, restraining the passions ; in fidelity to all men, especially those in authority ; and in always preserving the exact truth. They were rigid observers of the Mosaic law.

There is a slight departure from the trammels of belief, but scarcely perceptible. He spoke no new truths: he could not. He dealt in moral maxims, old as the ages. He made no new application of old truths. The famous sermon combines the threads of morality running through Greece and Rome and the whole pre-Christian world. Each of his moral precepts can be traced to foreign origins; but in this connection it is sufficient to indicate the career of some of the most prominent. The Golden Rule and the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man are illustrations. The first, supposed of itself sufficient to demonstrate the divine inspiration of Jesus, had received distinct utterance at least six centuries before his birth.

VIII.

THE MIRACLES OF JESUS.

For the operation of God is not outside of the world, but according to the laws of the world, because the world is in and through God; hence no particular fact can ever be known, with scientific certainty, to be miraculous. — HASE.

I see, in the action of the powers which Jesus exercised, the inimitable method of nature. — FURNESS.

It will always be as great a miracle that God should alter the course of natural things, as overturn the principles of knowledge and understanding in a man, by setting up anything to be received by him as a truth which his reason cannot assent to, as the miracle itself; and so, at best, it will be but one miracle against another, and the greater still on reason's side, — it being harder to believe God should alter, and put out of its ordinary course, some phenomenon of the great world for once, and make things act contrary to their ordinary rule, purposely, that the mind of man might do so always afterwards, than that this is some fallacy or natural effect, of which he knows not the cause, let it look never so strange. — LOCKE.

ESAIAS had said, "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."

It was absolutely necessary that Jesus should vindicate his title to the Messiahship, by becoming a wonder-worker. His biographers would at all hazards give him miraculous power. The age demanded miracles. Control over the powers of nature and men was patent evidence of a divine mission. Healing of the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead, were all embraced in the power of a divine

teacher. The gospel records of these wonder-works, it is said, were made by inspired men, and have always been considered of great consequence. The Christian faith rests on the foundation of miracles. They have been constantly used to prove incontestably the truth of that faith. Uhlman correctly says, "Miracles cannot be got out of the Bible, either by natural explanation or figurative interpretation. . . . The least miracle is as incomprehensible as the greatest. In vain, also, is the attempt to disjoint the miracles ; to separate them as *débris*, and to hold fast only what remains : for all Christianity rests fundamentally upon the miracle of the appearance of Christ ; and whoever rejects miracles must also reject the fundamental facts of Christianity, the chief article of Christian faith. Nor is this all : he must reject all revelation, for revelation is miracle. . . . To speak plainly, whoever denies miracle has no God."

If Jesus was the expected Messiah, it was essential that he perform miracles. Moses and the prophets were wonder-workers. The least of the latter were expected to prove their mission by a sign. The Pharisees desired Jesus to give them a sign, meaning a miracle. The Old Testament defined the miracles the Messiah would perform. Isaiah had said, "Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped : then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing."

Jesus must act this part. His soul repeatedly

rebels against the clamor, and he exclaims that to this generation no sign shall be given ; but he yields to the severe necessity. The greater portion of the Gospels is composed of narratives of wonderful works. Jesus, himself, employs them to support his claims to the disciples of John. The evidence satisfied his devotees, and has formed the stock in trade of the Church ever since.

The casting-out of demons is by far the most common occurrence. The Greeks, as well as the Hebrews, believed that many forms of sickness, as epilepsy, fits, and especially insanity, were the direct results of demoniac control. The Persians held that the demon or demons entered, and took up their abode in the body. This belief was introduced into Greek and Hebrew spirit-ology. Lucian and Josephus agree in their beliefs of the offices of such demons. These demons were taught to be the disembodied souls of wicked men, who belonged to the realm of Satan.

Prophets and sages, by incantations and charms, by calling superior beings to their assistance, could gain control of these demons. Solomon composed incantations for alleviating sickness, and expelling demons ; and Josephus asserts that he had seen their efficacy proven. The exorcist set down a cup of water, and commanded the demon, when he departed, to overturn the cup, that all might know that he had gone out. The Emperor Vespasian was a witness of the power of this formula over demons.

From the description of the possessed in the Gos-

pels, we readily learn that they were simply suffering from diseases, mostly nervous, and easily controlled by psychological influences. Modern science has forever settled the subject of demoniac possession ; and it were a waste of time to disprove what, from the nature of things, could not have occurred. Jesus was fallible, like other men, and received the belief of his age.

According to the evangelist, who, strange to say, is the only writer who makes the record, the first miracle of Jesus was performed at Cana, where, at a wedding, the wine being exhausted, he converted, through the influence of his mother, six vessels of water into wine. This he did to "manifest his glory, and his disciples believed on him." The guests had already drank all that was provided, when Jesus created six vessels more, containing two or three firkins each. When the quantity thus created is considered, well may the critic call this a waste of the godlike, Messianic power, and the scoffer sneeringly taunt him as a "wine-bibber." Taking the firkin as equivalent to the Hebrew bath, a vessel of three firkins would contain 157.5 gallons ; and six such vessels, 945 gallons, or nearly thirty barrels.

The evangelist, who wrote later than the other disciples, felt the influence of Greek thought, and, hearing the wonderful exploits of Bacchus in transmuting water into wine, applied the same power to Jesus, but most gloriously magnified.

The feeding of the multitude is another reproduction of hoary myths. Moses fed the people in the

wilderness with quails and manna. Elisha, in time of famine, fed a hundred men with twenty barley loaves and a few ears of corn, and there was left thereof.

The rabbins believed that holy men could make a small quantity of provisions suffice for great demands.

The Messiah must equal any and all the prophets ; and in all the Gospels is related the feeding of five thousand with five loaves and two fishes, and two of them speak of a second feeding of four thousand with seven loaves and a few fishes. The last story is considered by critics to be a repetition of the first. In both, the fragments are made greatly to exceed, in quantity, the original loaves. No equivocation can explain this miracle satisfactorily, except the honest rendering that the writers intended to reproduce, from the authority of the prophets, a grand proof that Jesus is greater than them all. To prove him greater, the wonder-work was enlarged. The hundred men of Elisha became thousands, and the twenty loaves were reduced to five.

The transfiguration is one of the greatest miracles, and was wrought, not by, but in, Jesus. It showed him to be an instrument in the hands of a superior power. John, in whose peculiar system this wonder would have been particularly grateful, omits it altogether. The other apostles give a lengthy narrative. Matthew says, Six days after Jesus announced his passion, he took three of his disciples, and went up into a mountain, and was

transfigured before them : his face shone like the sun, his raiment was white as light, and Moses and Elias appeared talking with him. They were overshadowed by a cloud ; and a voice spake, "This is my beloved Son : hear him." The terrified disciples fell on their faces ; and when, at the bidding of the Master, they arose, they "saw no man save Jesus only." As they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them to tell no one until the son of man was raised from the dead. *

Luke does not say the disciples were afraid, but "heavy with sleep ;" and he knows the subject of conversation between Moses, Elias, and Jesus. The disciples awake to see the three conversing. A cloud then conceals them from view, and the voice speaks out of the cloud. This is grandly dramatic ; but very unnatural for men, under such circumstances, to become sleepy.

The various explanations of this great event, proving incontestably the divine mission of Jesus, are all equally weak. That it was a vision, that the disciples dreamed, that it was a deception practiced on them by Jesus, are all equally baseless.

It is easy to discern the source of the story : Moses, the great lawgiver, ascends the mountain, taking three friends with him to witness the grand spectacle. He is overshadowed with a light cloud, from which Jehovah speaks the identical words of Psalms and Isaiah : there is only a change of names. Moses received the law. Jesus is brought in contact with the two great men of the past who saw

through the ages his advent, and were his types ; and they reveal to him the mystery of his death.

It were a vain task to trace each wonder-work through its chameleon forms of myth to its source. Even granting all that is claimed, if intended to vindicate the Messiahship of Jesus, they were failures. The multitude, it is said, were astonished and satisfied, for the ignorant masses always follow the wonder-worker ; but the shrewd scribes and Pharisees believed not. The sign they demanded was not given. Even the disciples were not too firm in their belief.

Miracles support the lowest form of faith. They satisfy ignorant credulity. It has been a prominent belief with all peoples that prophets could control nature. The medicine-man of the red Indian is a rain-maker, and heals the sick by conjurations. The prophet of Central Africa uses the few words his vocabulary supplies to pray for rain. Throughout all antiquity, the great sages, they who made claims to divinity, supported their claims by the wonders they performed. Often understanding causes of which the multitude were ignorant, they gave astonishing proofs of their power over the elements. Often they worked through agencies of which they themselves were ignorant. In the mass, these stories are the outgrowth of tradition ; legends having a common similarity. Just as the acuteness of moral and intellectual perception is now spoken of, the wonder-working was then accepted. Moses went before the King of Egypt, and sought, by the tricks

of a juggler, to impress his divine authority. Aaron's rod became a serpent ; and the wise men whom Pharaoh called in threw down their rods, and they also became serpents. Aaron turned the waters of Egypt into blood : so did the magicians. He brought the frogs : so did they. He brought the plague of lice : they failed. It was a contest between jugglers, and he proved himself more deeply versed in magical lore than they ; and the wise men admitted, by withdrawing from the contest, that he had more power with the gods than they.

When the apostles were sent out, they rested their faith on miracles, and performed miracles themselves in proof of their divine commission.

If miracles are evidence, then every religious belief ever introduced into the world is true ; for all rest on this foundation, and the evidence they bring in proof of their miracles is equally conclusive. Crishna performed far more wonderful works than Jesus. Pythagoras was a worker of miracles. The Catholic world have always retained this gift, a pillar of strength lost by the Protestants by being cast aside.

Had Jesus been the Messiah, and had it been necessary for him to prove his Messiahship by miracles, he would have poured such a flood of wonderworks on the world, that all men must have been convinced, and bowed at his shrine. He came to save. Why not, then, have made his mission incontestable ? Why leave it in doubt even to men of his own day, and a matter of blind faith to ours ? It

may be said, Such was the decree of an inscrutable Providence. Science knows no inscrutable Providence. Through our reason only can a revelation from any source reach the understanding. Faith will answer for the ignorant and unthinking, but is the worst of evidence in a court at law or the court of reason. If miracles are of use in one age, they are in another. If the power to perform them was bestowed on Jesus and his apostles to prove their mission, they have completely failed; for only a very small part of the people among whom they occurred were convinced.

They apparently produced little effect on those who witnessed them. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel, encamped below, witnessing the black clouds that gathered around its awful brow, listening to the terrific thunders, and feeling the earth quake beneath them, instead of falling prostrate before a spectacle that must have subdued the stoutest heart, looked around them for an object of worship, and, remembering the Egyptian apsis, demanded a golden calf. It is always thus with miracles. They are nothing in their own time: their magnitude increases with the space of time across which they are seen. The Israelites, after witnessing the plagues of Egypt, and being delivered from the pursuing hosts by the astonishing separation of the waters of the Red Sea, permitting them to cross on dry land, shortly repined, and wished they were again under the hands of their former masters. Such narratives should be judged,

not so much by the statement, as by the effect produced on the witnesses. Men witnessing an earthquake or any terrific display of elemental power do not play harpsichords.

A miracle can only be seen through an eye-glass ; and, contrary to the laws of optics, the farther off, the larger it becomes. They were more common in the second century than the first. The cure of the most obstinate diseases, and even the resurrection of the dead, were not esteemed uncommon occurrences in the days of Irenæus. It is suggestive, that, although witnessing so many astounding occurrences, the philosophers should reject the truth of the resurrection. A noble Grecian promised the Bishop of Antioch to become a Christian if he could be shown a single person raised from the dead. The challenge was declined. Even on eye-witnesses, there seems to have been no effect corresponding to the cause.

The Jews had so little interest in the miracles and divine mission of Jesus, that only one Gospel was written in their language, and the original of that was not preserved. They do not seem to have observed the astonishing sympathy manifested by nature with the pains of the crucifixion. Nor do the heathen philosophers, as Pliny and Seneca, in whose lifetime it occurred, appear to have received intelligence of these wonders ; though the former wrote a laborious work on wonderful phenomena, containing all that the most indefatigable industry could collect. That such events should have occurred in a province

so thoroughly known as Syria, and not have been known at Rome, is simply impossible.

The positive views taken of all occurrences at present banishes miracles into the remotest and darkest corners of creation. They have followed witches and Satan; and their mention as recently occurring brings a smile on the face of scholars. Fifty years ago, it was an object gravely to discuss and refute their possibility: that necessity is now passed. The belief in the fixity of the laws of nature is now so firmly established, that the mind is suspicious of any event said to transcend them. Not that any one has brought forward incontestable argument against miracles that have weighed aught with the masses. The age has grown out of this childish belief. We regard with pain the heralded Messiah, the Saviour of the World, becoming a wonder-worker, descending to the level of the medicine-man, or the black rain-maker, and founding his claims to divinity on such poor supports. We acknowledge the necessities of his age, and are silent.

I X.

THE APOSTLES SENT FORTH.

Whence has he this wisdom? Is he not the son of Joseph, the carpenter?
— BIBLE.

The sharp-eyed Jew saw nothing marvelous in Jesus.

THE firmness of Jewish prejudice in the mind of Jesus is clearly shown when he despatched his apostles to preach his gospel, not to all the world, but to the Jews. He strictly commanded them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles; nor, into any city of the Samaritans, enter ye not." This narrowness of view, and selfishness for the Jew, singularly contrasts with the universal love that afterwards dawned on his soul. His commands to the twelve were in accordance with the customs of the Essenes. They must take no thought of the morrow: neither scrip nor gold must they carry; but, when they arrived at a strange city, inquire for the worthy, and there abide. When the Essenes traveled, they always followed this usage; and, as they were bound to entertain each other, wherever they went they found brothers and friends.

This sending-forth was only preliminary, and they only dispersed through the neighboring towns. Afterwards he sent out seventy disciples, two and two,

to herald his coming to the cities. These went out but a short distance; for they return enthusiastically, claiming that even devils are subject to them. In this mistaken belief, they were encouraged by Jesus, who told them he himself had seen Satan as lightning fall from heaven, and charged them not to rejoice that he had given them this power, but, rather, that their names were written in heaven.

X.

THE DEATH OF JESUS.

But, if all the charges against the New Testament are true, what then? —
THEODORE PARKER.

For Jesus is unique in everything, and nothing can compare with him. —
RENAN.

IN the details of the fatal journey, the evangelists differ, but not more than should be expected, considering the time intervening between them and the event. The Passover called all true and faithful Jews up to Jerusalem ; and Jesus and his followers, in this instance, observed the customs of their country. In his mind, the result was certain. He saw clearly the failure of all hopes of founding a temporal kingdom. The young and ardent prophet flung himself against the rock of Mosaic theology, and found it unyielding. Like all reforms, the world over, he had expected to accomplish in a lifetime the work of centuries. Seeing truth so plainly himself, he thought he had only to state it, and all men would give it welcome. The ideal was a blooming Eden ; the actual, a desert over which the withering blasts of prejudice and superstition swept with irresistible violence.

Sadly he contemplated the journey to the sacred

city, where he intended to pursue a course which must bring on him the curses of the rulers, and give him over to their power. When he related to his companions what would happen, they seemed not to realize his words. Their minds were filled with the ideas of temporality, and were ever ready to dispute for precedent in the glory of the new government.

Jesus saw that such a kingdom could never be established; and he exchanged it for a spiritual empire: but it was long after his death that the minds of his followers absorbed this divine spiritualization. Even now, his second coming, in power and glory, is expected by millions of people; and the New Jerusalem is a counterpart of that his early disciples expected him to establish.

The entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem is differently narrated in the Gospels. Matthew says, that, from the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples forward, telling them to secure an ass, tied, and a colt with her. They did so, simply saying to the owner, the Lord hath need of them. They spread their clothes on them, and Jesus rode them *both* into Jerusalem. According to Mark and Luke, Jesus desired an animal whereon man never sat. In that case, he must have rode the suckling colt, which is highly improbable.

But why must Jesus enter Jerusalem in this manner? Zecharias had made a prophecy interpreted to that effect. At once we learn that the event is shaped to a supposed prophecy, and becomes doubtful. To identify Jesus as the Messiah, it was neces-

sary to bring all possible evidence. The prophecies must be fulfilled; and, in the ardent minds of the apostles, that a prophecy had been made was equivalent to the occurrence of the event predicted.

As Jesus approached the city, multitudes came forth to meet him; and they, or the disciples,—the statements differ,—in wild excitement, broke branches from the trees, and threw them in the way, or spread their garments in front of him, and shouted, “Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to the son of David!”

The people in the city were excited by the outcry, and asked, “Who is this?” They were answered, “Jesus, the prophet of Nazareth.”

Jesus made many allusions to his death, but so vaguely that they were not understood, and his disciples were wholly unprepared for the event. They said, wailing, “The chief priests and rulers have crucified him; but we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” In their minds, the end of all their hopes had come, and their cause perished.

The apostolic writers prove, by the authority of Moses and the prophets, that the Messiah was to suffer pain and death; but they wrote long after the event, and are not evidence that such views were entertained by Jesus or his immediate followers. The Jews believed in two messiahs, Ben Joseph and Ben David; the first of whom would, after uniting all the tribes, perish in the great battle between Gog and Magog.

The idea that the Messiah was to take on himself the sins of the people, in some manner, existed before the advent of Jesus. The Christ was to encounter the Antichrist, and annihilate him with the spirit of his mouth. The pain he would suffer is alluded to ; but his death forms no part of the scheme.

Like all Jews, Jesus was versed in the law and the prophets. He understood, or is so represented, the prophecies to apply to him. He was the Lamb of God. As the sinner offered up his lamb for his sins, God offered his for the remission of the sins of all mankind. He gave up his life as a ransom for many. His words show that he at length saw success only through death. He knew the efficacy of the martyr's blood. He was a shepherd, and would die for his sheep. He would not swerve in instructing his flock in the truth. He was the seed, which, unless it fall into the ground, and die, it abideth alone ; but, if it die, it bringeth forth fruit.

He is represented as courting death. He made no effort at concealment, but, on the contrary, tempted the violence of the ruling class. He went directly into the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and cast out all those who bought and sold therein ; the people shouted, " Hosanna to the son of David ;" and Jesus gave moral instruction, and cured the blind and lame.

At these unusual proceedings, the chief priests were offended (it is strange they were not more outraged), and endeavored to silence his questions.

These, he, with the adroitness of a commentator, turns on them. Matthew crowds almost all the moral teachings of Jesus into this visit to the temple. From the temple, it was customary to expound the law; and it was dramatic to represent Jesus as uttering in that sacred fane a flood of parables and moral maxims. If he spake what is recorded, the priests were justified in securing him. They did what all good magistrates are bound by oath to do. He set himself determinedly against them, poured a stream of scorching invective and sarcasm against their dearest beliefs, and allowed himself to be called king, and threatened, by his influence, to incite sedition and rebellion.

They secured him, and brought him before the tribunal. The part Judas is made to act is of no consequence. Poor Judas has swung from the moral gibbet, high in the bleak blast of the world's scorn, simply for doing what he was expected to do when accepted as a disciple. Jesus, when he rebuked his follower who struck off an ear of the high priest's servant, remarked, that, if it were necessary, he could, by prayer to his Father, bring more than twelve legions of angels to his aid; but this must all be that the Scriptures might be fulfilled.

Previous to the seizure, Jesus is represented as partaking, with the twelve, of the paschal feast. The words he is said to have uttered have, perhaps, caused more controversy than any other portion of the gospel. Presiding as head of the family, he broke the bread, and said, "This is my body,"

and, on passing the wine, "This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Whether this passage be taken literally or symbolically is of smallest consequence: but there was a time when it was considered of such moment as to divide the Christian world, and engage the acutest intellects; but it has passed, and now is only a curiosity of mental progress.

It is narrated, that, after the supper, Jesus and the twelve came to Gethsemane, where he endured the agony. The fierce, prophetic fire had died out. He saw himself in the power of the old superstitions he had recklessly dared, and saw the impossibility of escape. To die for an idea is grand to contemplate; but the heart of the martyr is not necessarily made of adamant.

Jesus had promulgated truths with all the ardor and impetuosity of an enthusiast, and met only rebuke and contumely. He had been able to gather around him a few of the lowest of the people; but the wealthy and powerful stood aloof. His grand Messianic kingdom had vanished, and its spiritual realization seemed afar off. Ah! the old is all-powerful, is adamantine, and can only be softened and conquered by blood.

His followers understood him not. They, even at this dark hour, expected to be soon called to separate thrones of power. With him they had little in common. He retired from them, and threw himself down, and prayed to the Father to take, if possible, the cup from his lips. The prayer was useless; for

his fate was already sealed. We sympathize with Jesus ; for all have experienced his pangs, and have sent up the same petition. A detachment of soldiers from the temple, accompanied by a tumultuous crowd, met him ; and Judas indicated his master by kissing him, or, according to the fourth Gospel, Jesus steps forth from the garden, and confesses himself the person whom they seek. The early opponents of Christianity urged against it, that its founder fled from the city, and was captured like a common malefactor, and instanced the heroism of the pagan world. These objections were current before the Gospel of John received its final gloss ; and then Jesus advances, and delivers himself up, thus silencing this charge. It is convenient to have biography written *after* the critics have expressed their opinions.

Jesus was led before Pontius Pilate to be judged. The chief priests and elders did not dare to punish him themselves, for fear of the people. They desired to be sustained by the power of Rome. Pilate, after examining him, became convinced of his innocence, and endeavored to persuade the Jews to accept another prisoner in his place. This they angrily refused ; and, to humor them, he scourged and delivered him into their hands. The Gospels, in their narration of the event, vary : this may be considered their general expression.

It was customary to yield one prisoner to the people at this time ; and Pilate hoped to save Jesus by making a substitution. But the bigotry of the

The Death of Jesus.



Jews prevailed. He had no interest in the turbulent nation, further than to administer the Roman government. He is said to have washed his hands of the deed ; but, this being a Jewish custom, it is very improbable that a Roman would adopt it.

The howling multitude led Jesus away to execution, reviling and scoffing him by the way ; and when they came to Golgotha, the place of skulls, they set up the cross, and crucified him. Crucifixion is one of the most painful forms of death, and was considered the most ignominious. It was usual for the executioners, when they were merciful, to give the sufferers a beverage of wine and strong spices, to stupefy, and render them insensible to pain. This is the draught to which Mark undoubtedly alludes as given to Jesus ; but Matthew, believing the prophecy, "They gave me also gall for my meat, and, in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink," must be fulfilled, converted this merciful, stupefying draught into gall and vinegar. John enlarges still further ; and his narrative becomes a fragment of a drama. Jesus cries from the cross, "I thirst." He did this that the prophecy might be fulfilled ; and, knowing that all had been completed, he expired. Suffering the last dread pangs of mortal agony, he might cry, "I thirst," as most men do at the hour of death ; but that he had in mind a prophecy which he thus fulfilled is a dream of a biographer writing in quiet, not the last words of a man nailed to the cross.

It was Roman usage that the garments of the

executed fell to the executioners; and that the soldiers who assisted at the crucifixion shared those of Jesus is not singular. But the evangelists say that it was done to fulfill a prophecy, which they must have completely misunderstood, or they would not have thus applied it.

The disciples dispersed on the seizure of their master; and the silence of the first two narratives leads to the inference that they had not assembled at the crucifixion. John represents himself as having been present, with the mother of Jesus; and, at the suggestion of the latter, he assumed the place of her son. The iridescent bubble of temporality, which flashed before the minds of those ignorant fishermen, had burst. They were panic-stricken.

The cry of the agonized spirit of Jesus, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" with the sufferings at Gethsemane, are supposed to be a part of the means whereby Jesus vicariously atoned for the sins of the world. If an *infinite* sacrifice is required for man's infinite sin, then God alone must suffer. If the humanity of Jesus suffered, then the sacrifice was vain. If God was nailed to the cross, could he suffer? How? Who can tell?

Theologians have discussed this question from every possible point of view, and have mutually destroyed each other. What possible use the crucifixion of a man or of a god can be for the salvation of mankind, it is impossible to say. If we believed the blood of a lamb or an ox was acceptable to God, then we might suppose that of man would be more

propitiating ; but we do not. The agony was a subject of reproach to the early Christians, who in their embarrassment sought to explain it away. Jesus did not manifest the fortitude, in supporting his sufferings, of the two malefactors crucified by his side. To support pain unflinchingly was considered godlike by the ancients ; to complain, most ignoble.

XI.

BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

But what of Christ? Is anything true and right because he approves it, or false and wrong because he condemns it? Had Christ a right to legislate morally for all ages and nations? . . . Christ was a man; nothing more, nothing less. . . . God in one cannot save all. To save all, he must be incarnate in all. God as a life-principle in one man can no more give life to another, than, as the life of one oak, he can give life to all oaks. — HENRY C. WRIGHT.

EVEN before the apostolic writers made their records, rumors were current that Jesus was not dead when taken from the cross; and his resurrection was in that manner explained. Sometimes the victims lingered for days; and it was usual to end their misery by breaking them. The soldiers found Jesus dead, and did not break him. They were surprised, as was Pilate, that he had so soon died; and, to test the truth of his appearance, they pierced his side with a spear. This passage is a curious mosaic of prophecy, explanation, and apology. It was necessary that Jesus should die; and, to make the parallel complete, as the paschal lamb was perfect, his limbs must not be broken. "Not a bone of him shall be broken." This rendering at once casts doubt on the subsequent assertion; and, to prove to a certainty that Jesus was dead when

taken down, the embellishment of a spear-thrust was added, still further to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah.

The Romans left the crucified on the cross to be devoured by beasts of prey, or consumed by the weather: the Jews buried them in a place assigned for the executed. A disciple of Jesus begged his body, and placed it in his own new tomb.

As the disciples did not expect the resurrection, and were incredulous and astonished when it did occur, the request of the chief priests for a guard over the tomb, for fear the body might be stolen, and the claim of his resurrection from the dead thereby sustained, is a most singular one, and wholly inexplicable. They are represented as understanding the doctrines of Jesus better than his most intimate followers. The guard was furnished, and set over the tomb. They were an insufficient guard; for Jesus arose, and departed out of the sepulchre, and they hastened to tell the high priests, who, after consultation, bribed them to say, that, while they slept, the disciples came, and stole the body away. This is not only improbable, it is impossible; for, had the soldiers accepted the bribe, they well knew that for Roman soldiers to sleep at their posts was certain death. The martial law of Rome was inexorable. The narrative of Luke renders it certain that no guard was stationed over the tomb. On the first day of the week, the women, having prepared ointments and spices, repair to the sepulchre to embalm the body. This they would not have done had the

tomb been sealed, and a guard of foreign soldiers placed over it. They found it empty ; and two men stood by them, with shining garments, and told them he had been raised from the dead. When they related this to the disciples, they received it as an idle tale. They knew nothing about a spiritual resurrection.

The same day, as two of them went to Emmaus, Jesus walked, unrecognized, with them, and conversed. They invited him to tarry with them ; and, at the evening meal, he brake bread, and blessed it. Their eyes were opened, they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.

When they returned to the other disciples, and recounted the strange event, Jesus appeared among them. They were terrified ; but he convinced them that he was flesh and blood. Even then he is represented as having great reverence for the Scriptures, and desired to open their understanding in regard to it. He then led them out as far as Bethany, where, after blessing them, he ascended into heaven.

In the narratives of the most stupendous miracle of the Bible, there is a wide difference. Matthew says the women came to see the sepulchre ; and an angel appears, and rolls back the stone, and tells them Jesus had risen, and gone before them into Galilee.

As they went to tell his disciples, they met him, and came, and held him by the feet, and worshiped him. And he told them not to fear, but to tell his

disciples to go to Galilee, and he would meet them there. They went to a mountain appointed, and saw him there, and worshiped. *But some doubted.* He commissioned them to go forth, and preach his gospel. Nothing is said about his ascension; but, rather, he expressly says he is with them always to the end.

Mark gives the historic kaleidoscope another turn. The women came on the first day to embalm the body of Jesus, and found the sepulchre open, and a young man sitting on the side; and they were affrighted. This young man, who is supposed to be an angel, told them that Jesus had already risen, and he would meet the disciples in Galilee. Jesus first appeared to Mary Magdalen, from whom he had cast seven devils. She told his friends; but they believed her not. As the eleven were at meat, he appeared to them, upbraided them for their skepticism, and gave them commissions as teachers. He then ascended into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.

The narrative of John is very minute; but it is the minuteness of a compiler, giving details of no value, and omitting points of vital interest. He wildly diverges from the others. Jesus was embalmed, and laid in a sepulchre, in a garden near by. Mary Magdalen went very early to the sepulchre, while it was yet dark. She saw no angel; only the open tomb and the burial-cloth. She ran to the disciples, and told them. They came, and, it is said, believed not that he had risen; for it is ex-

pressly said, "They knew not the Scriptures, that he must rise again from the dead:" but found that the tomb was vacant. They all went away to their own homes, except Mary, who stood without, weeping, and looking into the sepulchre. She saw two angels, who innocently ask her why she weeps. She replied because they had taken away her Lord, and she knew not where they had laid him. Saying this, she turned, and saw Jesus, but did not recognize him, mistaking him for the gardener. Then he called her name, and she knew him; but he commands her to touch him not. She went, and told the disciples; and the evening of the same day, as they were assembled,—for fear of the Jews, the door being shut,—Jesus appeared in their midst, and showed them his wounded hands and side. After eight days, he appeared again in the same manner, and gave Mary signs which are not recorded. He again appeared to the disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee; but they knew him not. He asked them if they had meat, and, on receiving a negative answer, told them to cast their nets on the right side of the ship; and they were not able to draw in for the multitude of fishes: therefore Peter said, "It is the Lord." No allusion is made to the ascension; and what became of Jesus afterwards is not mentioned.

These irreconcilable confictions are such as would grow out of legendary tales. They are the most unsatisfactory of any part of the Gospels, whereas they should be the most conclusive. The faith of the

Christian world rests on the truth of the resurrection. Unless this be proved, the whole structure falls. Christianity has no other proof of immortality than the resurrection of Jesus. If he is not raised, its faith is vain. As Hase observes, "Christianity in its essence—that is, as a perfect religion, essentially true—does not depend on the resurrection: but Christianity in its existence does; for it was victoriously established, and the Church actually founded, upon the grave of the risen Master."

The death of Jesus was attended with startling miracles. The elemental forces of nature sympathized with his suffering. For three hours previous to his death, the sun was darkened; and, at the moment of his departure, the veil of the temple was rent in twain; the earth quaked; rocks were rent; graves opened; and many of the departed arose from their tombs, entered the city, and were seen by many.

To explain this wonderful series of events by natural means, as has been so often attempted, is folly. We must first know if they occurred; for the probabilities are against them. They are mentioned by no other writers than the evangelists. The Church fathers, acknowledging the difficulty, appealed to pagan writers; but the evidence they adduced was against them. At the disappearance of Romulus, and the death of Cæsar, the sun was eclipsed. When great sages sank to rest, the orb of day—the light of the physical, as they were of the mental world—concealed his face.

These events must be considered miraculous, and, if so, for an object. The rending of the veil, revealing the holy of holies to profane gaze, the quaking of the earth, the darkness of the day, and resurrection of the dead, must have been to prove to the unbelieving Jews that the Messiah had met death at their hands, and thereby convert them to his doctrines. If for the latter purpose, they were complete failures. These terrible manifestations of the elements produced not the least impression. They passed unrecorded in an age which noted every departure from the general course of events; and only in the Gospels can even a mention of them be found. If many dead had been resurrected, and walked through the city, that fact alone would have been sufficient to have established Christianity. The miracles were for the express object of establishing the claims of Jesus to divinity, by wonder-works. In this object, they utterly failed. To say it was not in the scheme to perfectly satisfy man, but a large province was intentionally left to faith, is a beggarly subterfuge.

The Gospels record the transcendent events, yet afterwards make no reference to them. Nor do those who instance the resurrection of Jesus. What became of these re-animated dead? Did they afterwards reside in the city, and pursue daily labor or business? Was the cruelty of a second death forced upon them to show the power of Jesus?

XII.

DESCENT INTO HELL.

See and worship God in living men and women. — WRIGHT.

Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean: thy dead shall go down to thee dead. — SWINBURNE.

THE descent of Jesus into hell, or hades, is not mentioned in the canonical Gospels. It is alluded to by Peter, and was afterwards greatly developed in the Gospel of Nicodemus, a work growing out of the intense metaphors by which the fathers of the fourth century delighted to describe the triumph of Jesus over the agonies of death. This belief could not have been entertained until the atoning power of the blood of Jesus became a fixed dogma. Then it became necessary, as a part of the divine plan, that the souls of the departed hear the words from the lips of the divine teacher. The Greek and Roman mythology possessed gorgeous myths, dressed in the garb of poesy, of the descent of heroes into hades. The incarnated Crishna, according to Hindoo story, visited the unhappy nether world to give the troubled spirits opportunity, and a way of repentance and forgiveness.

The idea was ready formed; and its translation into the life of Jesus was only a change of place, resulting from the contact of pagan mythology.

XIII.

THE GOSPELS.

The Word of God is a sword, — an instrument of war and destruction. It falls on the children of Ephraim like the lioness that darts from the forest. — LUTHER.

The accepted Saviour of Christian nations to-night is the theologic Christ, — a strange Hebraic hybrid, half god, half man; a church monster, shapen, by the old ecclesiastic fathers and Roman bishops, from the most worthless portion of the cast-off drippings of pagan traditions. — J. M. PEEBLES.

FIESOLE never painted the heads of the Virgin nor the Christ except on his knees; and Renan thinks criticism should imitate his example. Wherefore? Is the Virgin Mother more holy than our own mothers? Is Jesus a god? If so, why is the Creator to be held in so much greater reverence as manifested in this man than in any other? It is time this reverence for holy men and places be done away. Our first duty is to gain the truth; and, by the simple act of so doing, we pay a higher reverence to the divine than by all the genuflexions of a lifetime.

A Christian cannot write a correct history of Jesus, nor a Brahman of Crishna. Both will consciously or unconsciously be warped by their prejudices, and the results of their labors thereby vitiated. Great libraries are easily filled with ponderous vol-

umes on the life of Jesus, supporting every view it seems possible to hold; and yet what can the reader gain from their perusal? The authors have all thrown their labors away; and the reader throws away his time in wading through their endless display of erudition brought to support favorite dogmas, and is lulled to sleep by the din of disputation, to which neither reason nor science are introduced.

Neander, in his life of Christ, sets out by acknowledging that we cannot free ourselves from presuppositions, or rather prejudices, and refuses to meet the demand that anything must be proven, and nothing taken for granted. He presupposes that Jesus is the god-man as a starting-point. He exalts "Christian consciousness" above reason or science, and, of course, whirls off in the beaten groove of his educational bias. Science knows nothing of "Christian consciousness." Its evidence is valueless in the solution of any problem. It is not what we think, or what we have been taught: it is what we know. If the Christian can appeal to "Christian consciousness," the Moslem can appeal to Mohammedan consciousness; the Brahman to Brahmanical consciousness; and each religious sect can prove its own narrow views by its "consciousness," which is the result of its peculiar education or its ignorance.

Before us stands the author of Christianity, grand, colossal, awful to contemplate by the religious mind. Is he to be classed with Buddha and Crishna? Are they fabulous, and he a reality? There are four biographies of this man extant. The last, that of

St. John, is rejected by critics ; but, for our investigation, it is of no material consequence whether we receive or reject it. Beyond the four Gospels, we have nothing except the rank weeds of the Apocryphal Testament. The passage in Josephus, once considered so full of meaning, has been discarded by the most partial as an interpolation ; and the few sentences, elsewhere found, have, without a doubt, the same origin. The philosophers of his day make no mention of Jesus. Strange fact ! yet not so strange when we consider that the Jewish nation itself was scarcely worthy of mention in the annals of the imperial empire. Constantly in a state of fermentation, heaving with the throes of incipient revolt, the victims of every disordered enthusiast or villain who made pretense to prophecy, the only thought given them by the calm and haughty Romans was how many legions to assign to hold them in obedience.

It is necessary that the Christ-idea have an individual to whom it can become attached. Reformers who have exerted more than ordinary influence on the fate of their fellow-men have invariably been selected. We now praise and love the man who brings us new light : in a former age, he was worshiped as a god.

There must have been a man who preached a new doctrine in Palestine, around whom the after-growth could gather. Who was this man ? Of what family ?

Our only reliance is in the New Testament. This

is composed of portions written at different times, by different men, for various purposes. To collate, compare, and correct the Gospels has been the herculean labor of modern criticism; and it may be said the commentaries thus produced are among the brightest monuments of the keen and subtle discrimination of the human mind. Uhlman thinks that the Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew, or, rather, in the vulgar language of the time, the Aramaic, and originally was a collection of the Lord's discourses, with interspersed narratives. It was enlarged afterwards, and translated into Greek. It must have been made very early, at least before the destruction of Jerusalem. Baur arrived at the conclusion that Matthew was first written one hundred and thirty or one hundred and fifty years after Christ. Uhlhorn says that the synoptical Gospels must have been in use in the Church as early as the middle of the second century. Celsus quotes from them; and, in 130-40, they were familiar to the Gnostics, one of whom worked Luke over for the benefit of that sect. Zeller thinks Luke was written about 130. Volchman dates Mark at 80, Luke at 100, and Matthew at 110. Köslin places the first writing of Matthew at 70 to 80; and its elaboration, ten to twenty years afterwards. Ewald came to the conclusion that Mark wrote after Peter's death, and Matthew wrote before the fall of Jerusalem, or about 70, and Luke about 75 to 80. Holtzman places the writing of the original drafts on which the Gospels are based nearer the era of Jesus, or between the years 60 and 80.

This great diversity of opinion arises from the absence of reliable data, and want of any certain indication in the works themselves. The most thorough investigators place the date of the writing at least one hundred years after the death of Jesus. Not until the third generation were the traditions of the Messiah fixed. During that hundred years, his words and deeds had been retained in the memory, or preserved in detached written fragments. Even writing was too costly, except for the extremely wealthy. After these generations of verbal report, the floating traditions were written down. By whom? It is impossible to tell. The first rude drafts were probably made; and, as new copies were executed, the copyists added or omitted to please their tastes. Books were not stereotyped then, but were changed by the process of copying, as oral traditions are affected by transmission.

It has not been as many years since the death of Washington; but who is there in this country, from memory alone, could write a true record of his sayings and deeds? It is true that the disciples of Jesus preserved, from love of their master, his memory with religious care; and only from this cause could any biography, however meagre, have been preserved. The Gospels, however, are very different from what they would have been had they been written during the life of Jesus, or even of the disciples. They were written for an object. Legends have gathered around the man of Nazareth: doctrines, from the first, have had to be supported,

and theories sustained. Especially is this the fact with the evangelist. The great difficulty is to ascertain the legendary, and lay bare the facts; to discover the motives by which they were first promulgated, and why introduced into the Gospels.

It is a difficult task; and the labors of others have been rather to build on the presupposition of infallibility than to show the human origin of the system. Of the latter, the apocryphal Gospels furnish evidence. Of themselves, they are of no value; but they show how rankly the weeds of error grew in the fertile soil of religious fanaticism. They are more mythic and legendary than the canonical Gospels, but filled with equal reverence for Jesus. They differ, not in kind, but in degree.

XIV.

THE EXTENSION OF CHRISTIANITY.

Christianity, in short, in a certain form, in a nation of savages as well as in a nation of philosophers; yet its specific character will almost entirely depend upon the character of the people who are its votaries. It must, therefore, be considered in constant connection with that character. It will darken with the darkness, and brighten with the light of each succeeding century. In an ungenial time, it will recede so far from its genuine and essential nature as scarcely to retain any sign of its divine original. It will advance with the advancement of human nature, and keep up the moral to the utmost height of the intellectual nature of man.

— MILMAN.

THE Hebrews belonged to a great family of nations, of which the Phœnicians, Carthagenians, Babylonians, Arabs, and Abyssinians, are branches. This is the Semitic family, or race, which, though confined to narrow geographical limits, and pastoral from the necessity of their locality, yet have exercised an incalculable influence on the history of the world. They have indirectly given their peculiar religion to all the great historic races. Islamism, Judaism, and Christianity, like three great rivers, flow from this fountain.

When the Hebrews first became known to history, they were composed of patriarchal clans, wandering over the plains of Syria, similar to those which now lead their herds over the inhospitable deserts of Arabia.

During the reign of David and Solomon, the Hebrew nation emerged from rude pastoral life, and first rendered permanent the fleeting forms of their language. Literary productions in Hebrew cannot be proven beyond that date.*

The idea of one eternal being could not have existed in a pure form for any great period previously; for Solomon did not fully resign himself to the commands of Jehovah. He married out of Judah; and, from altars erected on the hills about Jerusalem, the smoke of incense arose to please the gods of the Moabites, Ammonites, and Egyptians. Prophets were not wanting to correct this evil, out of which grew the separation of the two and ten tribes.

The Semitic race had neither plastic arts, national science, philosophy, political life, nor military organization. It never arose above mediocrity in any direction except religion. What we call civilization, to it was unknown. Of aristocracy, democracy, feudalism, it knew nothing. Their nobility was patriarchal. It dated, not from conquest, but from the family. It was wholly incapable of military organization, and dependent on mercenaries to fill the ranks of its armies. In consequence, they founded no proud empires, though they sent off colonies; and their cities flourished, and occupy prominent places in history. All these, in their grandeur, have perished. The race has become worn out, exhausted in its old seat, and has life only in Arabia.

* De Wette.

The Semitic has, by contact with and influence upon others, exerted incalculable influence on the history of the world. Of themselves, the Semitics had no correct idea of positive history. Their latest works, like those of Josephus, who felt the warmth of Hellenic culture, are overflowing with the wildest fables, and replete with instances of most astonishing credulity. The apocryphal Gospels seem scarcely the work of human intellect, so wild are their fancies; yet they were once unquestioningly received. Religion, by the blind faith it produces, finds everything credible.

The Indo-European nations, previous to their reception of Semitic ideas, never accepted their religion as absolute truth, and, of necessity, held the utmost tolerance; and only among them is found liberty of thought and true individualism. The Semitics, on the contrary, believed they had absolute truth; and that all other systems, differing from theirs, were false. The highest type of that race, the Jews, present the most unyielding obstinacy and bigoted religious intolerance, and have, with disastrous results, bequeathed those qualities to the Indo-Europeans, who have had their originally broad and elevated views overshadowed by the dwarfed conceptions of the Semitic.

The two tribes were true Hebrews. The Samaritans were not considered as Jews. They occupied the place of the ten lost tribes, but were an inextricable amalgamation. Shalmanzer, after a three-years' siege, demolished the power of the ten tribes,

and dispersed the captives over Media and Persia. With the haughtiness characterizing Eastern princes, he transplanted another people, the Cuthæans, "from the inner parts of Persia and Media," into Samaria. It is probable that the assertion of Josephus, that all the people were removed, relates only to the inhabitants of the city, and not to the roving population, who were of the same blood. The priests, however, were all dispersed. The new inhabitants introduced their own gods: but, being frightened by the plague, they sent for the captive priests, who came and taught them the religion of David; and they ever afterwards followed its teachings, claiming kinship with the Jews, a relationship against which the Jews protested, and scornfully spoke of their meanness in making the claim when the affairs of Jerusalem were prosperous, and denying it when the reverse was the case.

To Alexander, they claimed Jewish descent; but, to Antiochus, they claimed to be a colony of Medes and Persians, or Sidonians, and prayed to have their temple on Mount Gerizim dedicated to Jupiter Hellenius. Their prayer was granted, although the city of Shechem, the metropolis of Samaria, situated near the temple, was the refuge of all Jewish apostates. This looseness in the observance of ceremonies, and protection of fugitives and apostates, enraged the rigid creedists of Jerusalem; and a bitter enmity was always maintained. They waged predatory warfare on the lands of Judea, and carried off many slaves.

Their temple became sufficiently famous to raise

doubts, in the minds of Jews at Alexandria, which was the most meritorious,—that, or the one at Jerusalem. There was a progressive element in Samaria unknown at Jerusalem. There, diverse races met and blended ; and new ideas grew out of the amalgamation. The Mosaic religion, received by a new people, took a new form. New elements were introduced into the Jewish worship. New forms of prayer were used ; and the word “devotion,” before without an equivalent, has a meaning. A profound change is also observed in compassion for the weak ; kindness and pity before unknown. Love and charity were born. The inflexible Jew insensibly bent to the mental pressure of other races.

The captivity was of little weight when compared with the steady, inflexible hand of Rome. Like the talon-grasp of an eagle, it never loosened its hold, but, with steady pressure, forced obedience. Her empire extended from the Euphrates to the Atlantic ; from Britain and the German forests to the African Desert. For the first time in the history of the world, its diverse civilizations were brought under one central power. Wherever the Roman legions shouted their battle-cry, learning, arts, and the refinements of life, followed. The rude warriors of the North, and the effeminate races of the South, alike felt the civilizing influence. Her policy was not simply conquest, but absorption and assimilation. The conquered peoples blended with their conquerors. The great roads which radiated from the imperial city furnished easy communication.

Foreigners were no longer necessarily enemies. The idea expressed by the word "humanity" began dimly to be understood. The nations thus brought in contact studied each other. They compared gods and religions. The Romans preserved the customs and institutions of the subjugated nations, or even adopted their gods into their own theology; and thus, at the capital, all the deities were brought together in the Pantheon. Nothing could be better calculated to destroy faith in the gods thus compared. The philosophers of Greece had already seen through the sham. The cultivated intellect of Rome expressed itself in merciless satire or complete skepticism.

The Sages had, from early times, esoteric doctrines, which they shrouded in mystery, and were not allowed to teach the vulgar, who received the mythology as their religion. The secret doctrines were the purest moral precepts, and views of God and his relations to man. The popular religion trembled at the shock of conflicting myths and turmoil of the masses. The gods canceled each other. The Sages came not forward with their purer ideas, and the people were faithless. They had advanced to that point where the old would no longer subserve, and the new was not at hand. Faith in the myths once so cheering had perished, and a broader, deeper system was demanded.

The highest form of religion was received by the philosophers, who, by means of the mysteries, made it the property of a caste. They had a religion of

their own, and scorned the idea that the common people should know as much as themselves. They doubted even the sacred mysteries ; and the popular belief was a subject of merciless satire.

When the early fathers sought to expose paganism, they could but repeat the words of Cicero and Lucien. They found skepticism the fashion. Outwardly, on public occasions, the old religion was treated with respect ; but this was a thin guise for secret contempt. This feeling, originating with the thinking class, permeated downwards to the lower, and left them in an extremely unfortunate situation. They were superstitious, and felt the old supports yielding. They had lost faith in Jupiter and Apollo ; but ignorance begat a blind faith that demanded an object, and they were ready to bestow it on any system that promised aid. At this critical moment, Christianity presented itself to their eager minds. It did not break on the world like a blazing comet : the age was slowly prepared for it. Judaism, the most stable of worships, felt the deep current of popular growth. With the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, they ceased to worship the visible presence of Jehovah ; they bowed to an invisible, omnipotent spirit ; and thus, as a nation, they performed a religious service which the philosophers preserved shrouded with an impenetrable mystery. Their religion was admirably adapted to the wants of the people ; but they would not proselyte. It could not extend itself. It was wanting in strength.

They were exclusively the people of God ; and their arrogance repelled the Gentile world.

At this time, they were absorbed into the Roman Empire ; and their singular form of worship attracted attention. The new and fervent doctrines of the apostles at once strengthened Judaism, and made it the religion of all mankind. They broke down all distinctions in this or the future life. There were no elysian fields for favored heroes and sages. The humblest would be as blessed as the most wealthy. Mankind are brothers, of whom God is the father. The esoteric doctrines of the philosophers were given to the people. The Jews were not affected by the change. It left no trace on their impregnable superstitions. The Talmud, which embraces their entire intellectual movement, preserves no certain evidence of the influence of Jesus. As recorded by his own narrators, he began with thorough Jewish exclusiveness ; and not until he was convinced that the Jews would not receive him did he turn to the Gentiles. Almost immediately the Jewish nation was swept away, and the city of their pride leveled with the dust. The Gentiles made no distinction between Judaism and the teachings of the apostles. The new faith became a part of the old in their minds. The apostles preached the grand truths of universal brotherhood, love, and charity, and were everywhere hailed, by the skeptics to the old faith, as heavenly messengers. The highest development of Jewish thought was transplanted into the soil of a different race. It was no longer Jewish,

but cosmopolitan. The actual Jesus was lost sight of in the ideal Christ. All that was pure, good, and holy, gathered around this ideal. He was deified with the devotion of an earlier age. His religion was strong because it was all things to all men. It was the religion of the poor: there is no aristocracy in heaven. It perfects with the advancement of mind, always the ideal expression of the age. There is no necessity for miracle. There was a demand, and it was met. The man, Jesus, simply furnished a central object, around which the products of ideality might rally. These ideals were not produced by him, but by the wants of the age.

It is impossible for one man to attain the perfection which enshrines the Nazarene. Only the highest ideals of successive generations, concreting around one personage, could perfect the representation. The actual Jesus was an ordinary man; the ideal, the sum of human possibilities. One is historic; the other, a myth. This is true of all Christs: the real is a man, suffering, laboring, enduring pain and the rude contact of the world; the other is a god.

Christianity absorbed portions of the mythologies, and elastically received and expressed the noblest thoughts of the time. It was simple in its essential elements, and understood by the lowest, while furnishing themes over which philosophers vainly labored.

The origin of Christianity has two aspects,—its Jewish and Gentile. As the culmination of Juda-

ism, it was at first essentially Jewish : it was addressed exclusively to the Jews. They who received him as the Messiah did so spiritually, for the present only : he was to return, and establish a temporal kingdom, for the especial benefit of the Jews. The struggle against prejudice was hard ; but the horizon widened. The proselytes of the gate were admitted ; and at length Christianity declared itself the universal religion, and the temporal Messiah became the redeemer of the world.

The conversion of Paul was of incalculable consequence. He exerted, by his writings, an influence greater than that of all the other disciples combined. A learned man had, at length, entered the ranks of the persecuted sect. Not only learned, but zealous, determined, and unfailing, the apostles at once recognized him as a leader. His epistles became the gospels of the churches to whom they were addressed. He gave tone and direction to the whole movement.

The vision of Peter, annulling the foolish distinction between clean and unclean meats, is a key to the thoughts of his time. In its figurative application, it exerted a far greater influence. The light slowly broke on the apostles, that all races were alike in the sight of the father. They at first made the Jewish rite of circumcision essential to the entrance of the Church. They went to the synagogues to read the law, as was customary from immemorial time. The first society that met in a house of worship of its own was probably at Antioch. From

this society, Paul and Barnabas went to the council at Jerusalem as delegates, when the apostles and "elders, with the whole church," met to discuss the aspect of their affairs. The pharisaical converts brought with them uncompromising attachment to the Mosaic institutions; while the converts from the remote borders were tinged with diverse beliefs drawn from heathen sources. The result of this conference was a compromise. Judaism yielded to the pressure, and the door was thrown open to the Gentiles; but the spirit of bigotry made frequent protests afterwards, and attempted repeatedly to close it against all but the people of Jehovah. The society at Antioch was torn with discord; and an actual separation took place, the Jewish party withdrawing from the Gentiles, and carrying Peter along with them. It required all the power of Paul to allay the feud. Whenever he established a new community, the rancor of this exclusiveness manifested itself as soon as he departed. The Jewish element felt that it had superior claims, and energetically strove to contract Christianity to its narrow bounds. The Gentiles, while they accepted Christianity, were not willing to receive the senseless forms of Mosaicism.

The epistles of Paul indicate the extent of this conflict, and the wonderful confidence reposed in him by the churches. Christianity was first regarded as a Jewish sect; but, as it grasped the Gentile world, it became more and more severed from Mosaic institutions. A deadly hatred arose between

its believers and those who had crucified the Saviour. The destruction of Jerusalem severed the ties between the new belief and the old. The new convert saw in this destruction the fulfillment of the prophecies of Jesus, and was strengthened in his belief. The Jews feared and trembled. It was the closing act in the grand drama, forever consigning Christianity to the Gentiles.

The early teachers were uncompromising with Paganism. They were Jews with Jewish exclusiveness. For the conversion of their people, all they considered necessary was to convert the synagogue into a church, and the reception of Jesus as the Messiah. The worship of the same God was devoutly enjoined, and the Mosaic law was held in unimpaired reverence.

The Jewish Christians would not fellowship the uncircumcised followers of Christ; and, for a hundred years, it was a subject of controversy whether acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, without conformity to the Mosaic law, was sufficient for salvation. The controversy gradually changed grounds until it was doubted if a man could be saved if he *did* conform to the requirements of the law. The Nazarenes thought the law binding on them, but not on Gentile converts. The separation of the church from the synagogue was the work of time, and attended with many difficulties. The converted Jews held, that, if the Mosaic law was in any sense repealed, the act would have been attended with unmistakable evidence. That it was well under-

stood that Jesus taught obedience to the Mosaic law, and that it was to remain until the great catastrophe is shown by the silence of Paul and the apostles. In the great battle they waged in favor of religion for the whole world against the narrow schemes of Judaism, they make no appeal to Jesus, well knowing that he was against them.

The first fifteen bishops of Jerusalem were circumcised Jews. Their church united the old and new faiths; and they maintained, for more than a century, their conservative position. The final destruction of Jerusalem forced them to accept a Gentile bishop.

The rite of circumcision as a covenant with God was difficult to surrender, and probably was not omitted by those who felt it a duty for a long time. Baptism usurped its place, and satisfied the conscience.

To the Gentiles, the new religion was far different. To their philosophers, its grand conceptions of the Deity were acceptable, and they could only deplore the introduction of the doctrines of the mysteries to the vulgar. The common people were captivated by a religion formed expressly for them, purely democratic, vindicated by the death of a god, and assuring eternal life. They easily adopted the faith in the Eternal Father, and yet held to their favorite deities. Paganism was tolerant: the very antipode of Judaism. Its persecutions were sometimes terrible, but were never engaged in by the common people, except as moved by the ruling power.

The religion of Rome was an integral part of the State, and the magistrates were sworn to defend it ; but had it not been for aggressions on the part of the Christians themselves, arousing political fears, it is not probable that they would have been disturbed. It is thus certain that the success of Christianity depended vitally on the tolerance of paganism.

When the apostles journeyed out of Palestine, they found, wherever they went, communities of Jews ; for the Jews were scattered to all the cities of the empire as traders, and the new traders taught in their synagogues. Their doctrines were received as a modification of Judaism, and, being more liberal and congenial to the Gentile mind, were at once received.

The daring Paul first deserted the synagogue, and taught in the market-place. Contact with the world had broken down his exclusiveness. At Athens, he appears like other philosophers. Curiosity draws crowds around him. He stood surrounded by the art and refinement of centuries, gorgeous temples, statues of exquisite grace, all the symbols of a grand mythology ; claimed himself to be the interpreter of the unknown God, whose altar they had erected, and proceeded, in an unexampled language, to unfold his doctrines. His audience could not have agreed with him ; but they respectfully listened.

At Corinth, Paul taught for eighteen months uninterruptedly, and then, through the jealousies of the Jews only, was he brought before the Roman tribunal ; and then the case was at once dismissed as a

sectarian dispute beneath the dignity of a Roman magistrate.

Paul at length entered the Imperial City. His cause had preceded him. He found many believers awaiting him, and, for two years, remained with them. The year after his departure is marked as the era of the first pagan persecution. Christianity must have taken a strong hold, or it would not have incurred such summary vengeance. A great fire raged in the city, so terrible and uncontrollable that it excited superstitious fears. The people eagerly asked what deity they had offended, and what they had done to incur such dreadful punishment. Was it the worship of strange gods? All the old religions had long taken their places side by side in perfect harmony. Christianity was the only new belief, and hence called attention. It is probable that the prophecies, often repeated by the enthusiastic converts, of the end of the existing order, and the conflagration of the world, became a suspicious circumstance against them. They may have considered it as indicative of the speedy consummation of the prophecies, and, by acknowledgment before the tribunals, incurred the wrath of their judges.

Persecution, unless it exterminates, always invigorates the opposing cause. The terrible tortures inflicted by the magistrates of Nero silenced for a time, but produced an effect contrary to that intended. Christianity never extended so rapidly as in times when its profession entailed death.

The great conflagration drew down the anger of

the State. Under Marcus Aurelius, they incurred its displeasure by their reckless folly. The forgery of the Sibylline prophecies, announcing the fall of Rome in most terrible language, and the second coming of the Messiah, awoke a tempest of persecution. Pestilence, earthquakes, wars, and insurrections were all regarded as heralding the second coming of Jesus ; but the Romans considered them as indicative of the displeasure of the gods at the neglect of their worship by the Christians.

The Sibylline Oracles were the sacred books of the Romans ; and to forge them was sacrilege. The author of the spurious prophecy might justify himself by the Christian expedient, so often employed, of the end justifying the means ; but at least he was extremely unwise.

The emperor decreed the eradication of the apostates from the beliefs of their fathers. The Romans could not understand the resistance offered by the new converts. They could see neither sense nor propriety in not receiving Jupiter with the unknown god. They were ready and willing to worship them all. They did not ask the Christian to deny his god, but, in connection, receive the deities of Rome. Still more were they astonished by the calm indifference or heroic joy with which the Christians met the most excruciating tortures and most terrible forms of death. It was said the victims never resented, but prayed God to forgive their persecutors. If, overcome with terror, they recanted, they

were not reviled by their more steadfast brethren, but received and prayed for.

The convert gloried in the tortures inflicted. Weak young girls defied the most subtle pains that could be inflicted, and smilingly prayed while the executioners were breaking their limbs. The honors of martyrdom were so eagerly sought that bishops had to hold back their flocks from the flames and tortures.

Under the ecstasy of religious enthusiasm, when the choice was offered of bringing a sprig of frankincense, or leaping into a furnace of lime and fire, three hundred men unhesitatingly chose the latter. Mothers exhorted their sons to stand steadfast. At first, discretion was thought better than martyrdom, — “When men persecute you in one city, flee ye into another;” but, in the second century, it was thought base under any circumstances to deny their belief.

The willingness of the martyr does not prove his cause, only his zeal; and that is just as vehement for an evil as a truth. Christianity, had it remained pure, would never have converted the pagans. It absorbed many of their rites, customs, and modes of thought. The ceremonies of the Catholic Church and its most important holidays, as Christmas and Easter, are purely pagan, and taken directly from pagan customs. The Gentiles of the West gave her their ceremonies; and, from the East, she received many subtle truths. The Asiatic idea of the purity of spirit and inherent evil of matter was easily and

disastrously entertained. It was the parent of asceticism, on which the monastic institution was founded, and is yet visible in the celibacy imposed on the Roman-Catholic priesthood. It was a favorite opinion with the early fathers, that, had Adam remained obedient, he would have preserved his virgin purity, and the earth been peopled with immortal beings by some vegetative process. Marriage was tolerated only as a necessary evil ; and they surrounded it with laws which cause the thinker to smile, and the fair to blush. While Rome found it difficult to maintain the institution of the six vestal virgins, although they received the highest honors, such was the enthusiasm of the converts to the new faith, that multitudes of both sexes devoted themselves to perpetual chastity as a kind of martyrdom.

The Western mind was so constituted that Pythagoras and Plato found it impossible to introduce their Oriental dogmas ; and the latter rightly concludes that it is best to cultivate the body and spirit in unison, to the highest attainable state of perfection. Judaism had unconsciously absorbed portions of Orientalism. The Pharisee had received the more practical doctrines of Zoroaster ; and the Essenes the tenets of the remoter East. Hermits became ideal saints. The more the body was abused, the purer became the spirit. Orientalism introduced the polemic disputes on the nature of God and Christ, which rent the Christian world for centuries, and yet remain, as they ever must, undecided.

Entering into the spirit of the age, not so much

directing as conforming to its demands, the Church set forth its dogmas in the garb of heathen mythology. It poured its new wine into old vessels, first carefully mingling a large proportion of old wine with it. The scourge of the Roman Church was Orientalism, and for the very reason that it was Roman. It absorbed many heretical views of the Gnostics; but Western thought in the end triumphed, and pronounced the East a heretic.

To what an extent it gathered its strength from the Gentiles will be seen by reviewing its dogmas, festivals, and institutions.

Purgatory was transplanted from Roman mythology, as was also the power of prayer to relieve souls suffering therein. Hell was far more heathen than Jewish. The great annual festival of the pagans, for the souls of all their ancestors, became, through the policy of Gregory Thaumaturgus, the festival of the martyrs. The festival of the vernal equinox, called, by the Jews, "Passover," became Easter, in memory of the resurrection. The Egyptian festival of the sixth of January, in honor of Osiris found, became Epiphany. Their festival in honor of the birth of the infant Horus, and the Roman birthday of the invincible sun, became Christmas, the birthday of Jesus.

The hermits became monks; the vestal virgins, nuns; and the choral songs of Greece were received, and for centuries were the chants of the Church.

Christianity thus grasped everything that was vital in the old religion, and in so imperceptible a

manner that its aim was not discovered until it possessed all the power. As soon as it began to be taught by Gentile teachers, it began to assume the form of the religion it was supplanting. The most cursory view of Catholicism discovers that it rests far more on paganism than Judaism, not only in its moral tenets, but in the ceremonies which promulgate and enforce them.

The trinity is heathen, and met with strenuous resistance from the Jews. The cross was taken from Egypt, where it represented the power of reproduction, or the living element of nature. Images and paintings were taken from heathen temples; and the basin of holy water, which always stood in their porches to sprinkle the worshipers as they entered, was carried to the church. As the temples were adorned with the votive offerings of those whose prayers the gods had answered, so the churches were adorned with paintings and statues by those whose prayers the saints and martyrs had answered. As the temples were adorned with scenes from the lives of the hero-gods, the churches were ornamented with scenes from the lives of Moses, Joshua, the apostles, and Jesus. As the Gentiles wore the cross of Hermes, the Christians wore that of Jesus. As the former said their prayers by rosaries to these gods, the latter said theirs to Jesus. The ancient statues were rechristened. That of the river-god became Jordan; Orpheus and Apollo, Jesus; Isis and her child Horus, the Virgin Mary and her child Jesus. It was customary with all the

ancient artists to represent the gods with symbols. They sometimes gave them the heads of birds or animals to represent their distinctive qualities. Osiris was often represented with the head of a hawk; Isis, with that of a cow; &c. It is suggestive that the first effort of Christian art followed this method, giving Mark a lion's head with wings; Luke, the head of an ox; and John, that of an eagle surrounded with a glory. They all hold copies of the gospel. Jesus was represented as a lamb; and, on either side, his apostles are pictured as sheep. As the good shepherd, he stands in the midst of his flock.

As the pagans deified their good and great men, the Church canonized its saints and martyrs; and the Jewish Sabbath was discarded for the Roman Day of the Sun.

In this survey of the causes of the spread of Christianity, we can see no Divine Providence, but rather the imperfect hand of man. Had an Infinite God revealed himself through Jesus, for the purpose of redeeming the world from sin, he would have needed no assistance from interpreters or priests; for his presence could no more have been doubtful than that of the sun in mid-heavens. He would have given a revelation glowing with truth, and indisputable. We should be called on to receive no bungling record of men: a few great ideas absorbed from orientalism, bedecked with the ceremonials of paganism; translated one way in one age, and another in the next; all uncertain, vexatious, obscure.

To present a summary of the causes which oper-

ated at the advent of Jesus to diffuse his doctrines, we may consider, —

First, that they had a Jewish base.

Second, the tolerance of paganism, which allowed them to be transplanted into new soil.

Third, their universal adaptability.

Fourth, the destruction of Jerusalem, by which they were severed from their parent, and compelled to cosmopolitan growth.

The mental fruit of one race, the Semitic, was planted in the soil of a new and extremely diverse race, the Indo-European. It at once developed in accordance with the mentality of the new possessors. It became Indo-Europeanized Judaism.

Jesus was undoubtedly of mixed blood, and Paul was a Gentile with Jewish education. The contact of races is of vital import in the solution of this problem. Jesus gave utterance to universal charity, love, and brotherhood. Paul made it a reality. Without him, it would have scarcely been introduced to the Gentiles ; and, with the Jews, it had no vitality. On them, it made no impression. They remain the most decidedly unconverted people with whom Christianity has come in contact.

XV.

RESUMÉ OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JESUS.

It is no more necessary, for Jesus than for Luther, to understand all ancient literature, and be familiar with criticisms and antiquities; though, with men who think religion rests on his infallibility, it must be indeed a very hard case for their belief in Christianity.

If Jesus was God incarnated, what then?

HASE is a fine example of the purely theological reasoner. He begins his life of Jesus by revealing his purpose. It is to "show how Jesus of Nazareth, according to the divine purpose, by the free action of his own will, and moved by the circumstances of his time, became the Saviour of the world." He thus takes for granted that he is the Saviour of the world; and of course nothing can be expected of a man, however learned, who assumes a miracle as the major axiom of his course of reasoning. On the other extreme are those who doubt the very existence of Jesus, and consider the Gospels as records of myths. The proofs brought to sustain the latter conclusion would be satisfactory did they account for the central individuality which pervades them. The simple expectation of a messiah could not have been personified. The East always teemed with hermits. They issued from their seclusion, and,

attracting attention by their peculiar garb and wild manners, uttered prophecies, or taught the conceptions of truth revealed to them in the solitudes of the desert. They always drew after them numerous disciples, whether wise or ignorant, sane or insane. The insanity produced by fasting and solitude was considered by the ancients as demoniac possession ; and, however vague the utterance of the demons, it was always cherished as having a hidden meaning, and therefore all the more valuable. The enthusiasts were very numerous ; and some of them acquired considerable influence. One is mentioned by Gamaliel, in his defense of the apostles, as having four hundred followers, and another as drawing multitudes after him. John the Baptist is a type of this class. By nature prone to contemplation, severe, and retiring, the wilderness of rocky desert his congenial haunt,—thereby fasting, and crucifying the flesh,—he arose to that exalted state of mind we should call insanity. Then, leaving the solitude, he entered the haunts of men. A coarse garment thrown over his brawny shoulders, a leathern girdle fastened around his loins, his long hair and beard unkempt and matted, his hairy body but ill concealed, his manner wild and unsteady, he cried with hoarse voice, “Repent, repent: the kingdom of heaven, we have so long vainly expected, is at hand ! It is coming now ! I am the forerunner !”

There must have been a man Jesus ; and he must have been more than an ordinary hermit-prophet. He went into the wilderness, and fasted, as others

had done before him: he came forth to teach, as multitudes had done before him. His biographers put in his mouth all the moral truths of the age, and make him seldom act other than the part of a wise man. What he really did or did not say, it is impossible to state; but he must have resembled the pagan sages far more than the Hebrew prophets. His dress and manners were like the former. He uttered no new truths: he gave expression to the half-articulated thoughts of his time. The homage of John, the reverence of the apostles, the confession of the centurion, the reluctance of Pilate to sacrifice him, show that he was distinguishable from the crowd of minor prophets. That he was a divine being is a baseless hypothesis, exceedingly mischievous in its effects. The necessity of a god-man is made by presuppositions equally baseless. It is said, as man cannot compensate for sin committed against himself or others, he can never be restored unless by a power without and above him. As a sin can never be forgiven, but must be outgrown, there is no possible use for a sacrifice. The whole conception is false from the beginning to its termination. Of what use is God's becoming man through Jesus? Could he thereby take on himself the pain or punishment of others? Did he come to save the lost? There are none lost. Man cannot be lost from God. A finite being lost from the one Infinite?

Yet, as Neander rightly claims, on the godhood of Jesus depends the very being of Christianity. It

is founded on the infallibility of the Bible, and the atoning power of the blood of Jesus.

It is not unique in history that Jesus should be deified, or that, as an incarnation, he should take the position he occupies.

Impressed with a deep conviction of evil in the world, and the fallen state of man, the human mind conjured, from the depths of a diseased imagination, the idea of a great terrestrial crisis. The primary force which first set creation in motion becomes exhausted. The clock runs down, the gods rewind it, and a new cycle begins. The Aztec's cataclysm, the close of the Hindoo yugs, the Persian resurrection, the Stoic conflagration, the Scandinavian ragnarokur, the Christian day of judgment, are but different names for the same thought.

When the dread day arrives, man will need a mediator to present his claims, and share the burden of his sins. Such a mediator all nations and peoples claim. From the Indians of America to the Indo-European, all have had their hero-gods, throned in the world of spirits, who are to return to save and bless. The Peruvians, groaning under the iron rule of the Spaniards, looked forward to the coming of the Incas, to sweep their oppressors into the ocean, and bring again the golden age. The second coming of Montezuma is still expected by the people of the Nicaraguan Lake. The Brahman sadly awaits the advent of Vishnu to open the tenth avatar. The Parsee awaits the coming of Sociosh to resurrect the dead, and judge the wicked on a renewed earth.

The Buddhist awaits the birth of Maitei Buddha. The Jews yet are praying for their Messiah ; and the Christians affirm that the second advent of Christ draws nigh. At the birth of Christ, fanaticism was at its height in Judea. Pressed by a dominant conquering power, trembling for fear of the desecration of the shrine of Jehovah, implicitly believing that their Messiah would come, in glory and power, in the darkest hour of their anguish, and also believing that darkest hour was at hand, they were ripe for a great revolution. They understood not the watchword of their age, however. A temporal and kingly glory of empire dazzled their eyes ; and, in grasping for that, they lost all. They were exclusive ; while the watchword of Christ, "Brotherhood," was the key whereby the pagan mind was opened to an advanced morality.

This deification became a natural result of what Carlyle facetiously calls hero-worship. Self-evident as this explanation appears, what wrangling, what fire and blood, has it caused ! A century ago, and he who uttered such an idea would be the victim of rack and scourge ; and, even to this day, how few there are, although they believe it, dare utter it, or even dare face the Church sentiment by patronizing one who does !

The old conception of the godhood of Christ is the result of ignorance. Men received without thought the words of paid theological teachers. They did not go back to the past, and identify themselves with Jew and pagan, and learn how they

would think if they were living in the nineteenth century. How changed would be the view from that standpoint ! An unknown man preaching beautiful truths. Believing in the return of the great departed, he must be one of them. As his image enlarges, he must be a god ; and god he became in the minds of the next generation.

The deification of heroes excites unthinking mirth ; but, when we comprehend the ancient mind, we find that deification was founded on a beautiful philosophy. The ancients did not believe that the gods were once men, but that man had the capabilities of becoming a god. The soul was an image of the Deity ; and when it cast off the body, and ascended to eternal life, it became like its divine prototype. Whence the saying, "The soul returns to God, who gave it.

Plutarch says, "There is no occasion against nature to send the *bodies* of good men to heaven ; but we are to conclude that virtuous *spirits*, by nature and divine justice, arise from men to heroes ; from heroes to genii ; and, if it is in the mysteries, they are punished, shaking off the remains of mortality and the power of passions, that they attain the highest happiness, and ascend from genii to gods, not from the vote of the people, but by the just and established order of nature."

Thus, a thousand years before the subtleties of incarnation divided the Christian world, they disturbed the dreams of Grecian philosophers. It was customary to enthrone the virtuous hero in the

skies, not because it really changed the fact, but as an expression of esteem.

The Church at once received the rites of apotheosis, and, under the names of beatification and canonization of saints, retains them still, with unchanged meaning. These favored saints have ascended into the regions of delight, while the multitude remain in the dark, intermediate regions of hades, cheerless, dismal, and everlasting, where the many went, and the bright elysium where the few were gathered was not annulled. The mysteries were received almost as a whole ; but to the agonized and gasping votary was presented the glories of elysium or paradise, no longer a heaven for the aristocrat of intellect or power, but equally the heaven of the plebeian, the outcast, and despised. A virtuous life was the only requisite ; and, in those days, even that standard was not held very high.

The introduction of Christianity is generally regarded as occurring suddenly ; as a miraculous flash of divine power, brought into the world at once ; a wholly new and holy system, without a dependent fibre in the past. If the unprejudiced mind will peruse the history of the five centuries before and after the advent of Christ, he will find it difficult to fix on the time when paganism died, and Christianity began.

Christ stands not alone as a moral teacher, however remarkable the results of his teachings. The Church transformed the worship of the mother of the gods to the Virgin Mary, herself the mother of

a god ; the worship of minor deities, to saints who were simply apotheosized men. Hades became purgatory ; and elysium, paradise. The location even of the nether world was left unchanged. A new mystery was evolved out of the old, and for ages held the human mind in the most abject bondage.

The godship of Christ, his miraculous birth, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, — not to “the gods,” for Judaism gave a monotheistic tinge to God, — all have their counterparts, exact types, in pagan mythology.

It was not difficult to believe in the apotheosis of Christ when so many good and great men had been deified already. It was simply yielding to him his just reward.

The divine birth is not unique, but a counterpart of nearly every sage of antiquity. The ideas of the ancients are expressed in the biography of them all. Their study reflects a clear light on the god-men. Take, for example, Apollonius, born, only four years before Jesus, of a wealthy Grecian family. The old marine god, Proteus, before his birth, appeared to his mother, and told her he was about to become incarnated through her. He was brought forth while his mother was in a meadow, surrounded by a circle of swans. No sage of his time excited a stronger influence. He stayed the ravages of a terrible plague at Ephesus ; cast out demons ; raised the dead ; read the innermost thoughts of men ; and, when he became inspired, “a beauty shone in his countenance, and the words he uttered were divine.”

In casting out demons, he fixed his eyes on the sufferer; and then the demons began to howl, and, passing out, gave some sign of departure, as shaking a statue, and promised never to return. He foretold the future, and events occurring at distant places. Around his death is spread the halo of myths. He entered the temple of Diana, and a voice was heard singing, "Leave the earth, and come to heaven! come! come!" He was seen on earth no more, except as a spirit in the dreams of his disciples.

The claims of the sages of antiquity rested on their power to work miracles. Those of Jesus were the same in kind, and often less in degree, than those who went before him.

Renan claims that his miracles were more in accordance with natural analogies, and did not so outrageously set at defiance the laws of physics; that their motive was wholly moral; and that the invention of facts is not audacious, but confined to Old-Testament common-places. It is difficult to see why the healing of the sick by Jesus is more moral than by Apollonius; the casting-out of demons by the former, than by the latter; or what grand, moral system *he* sought to support by such means.

As Jesus wrote nothing, his teachings were subjected to the Protean changes of tradition. Like his portrait, which, from Jewish abhorrence for images, was not attempted till the second century, and then only placed in the sanctuaries of the converted heathen, it required nearly two centuries to render

their outlines permanent. The reception of the Church by the Greeks introduced their spirit, with its love of art ; and the portrait of Jesus became formulated, and the original, with blind faith, referred to the easel of St. Luke. The system and the portrait of Jesus became defined at nearly the same time, and in a parallel manner.

From the general tone of his teachings, he undoubtedly was well acquainted with the Essenes, if not a brother of that fraternity. The first Christian communities were established on their model. The apostles were all Fourierists and Agrarians, and from some passages, we infer, carried the holding of all things in common to the extreme which is now stigmatized as free love.

The study of the doctrines of the Essenes is necessary for the understanding of the position of Jesus. The Jews were divided into three principal sects, — Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The last was a recent order, compared with the antiquity of the former. Although Jesus taught doctrines not received by the Essenes, he must have belonged to the fraternity in order to become so thoroughly acquainted with its principles. The allusions to the raiment of John, and the words he uttered, show that he also belonged to the same order. The Essenes represent the philosophical element, such as it was, among the Jews. They rejected pleasures as evil ; esteemed continence, although they did not wholly discourage marriage ; and despised riches.

They held their property in common, with a steward appointed to superintend their common *cuisine*. They had no separate city, but dwelt in all cities; and each community had individuals appointed to look after strange brothers, who were at once made at home. They went on their travels without "staff or scrip," well knowing, wherever they stopped, brothers would welcome them.

They never changed their garments until worn out by time, nor sold one to another. They were pious and strict observers of their peculiar rites. They did not believe in swearing under any circumstances. They believed in being merciful, in helping the needy, and restraining the passions. They were distinguished for their fidelity, and ministrations of peace.

Those who joined them were taken on a year's probation. They were given the girdle and white mantle which distinguished the sect. If, after that trial, they manifested the right spirit, they were made partakers of the waters of purification, and, after two more years, were admitted into full communion. The initiate promised piety to God, and justice to man; to harm no one, either of his own accord, or at the command of others; to hate the wicked, and assist the righteous; to show fidelity to all men, especially those in authority; to be a perpetual lover of truth, and reprove those who lie; to keep his hands clean from theft or dishonest gain, and preserve inviolate the secrets of his sect. They were scrupulous in their observance of the

Sabbath, and firm believers in the immortality of the soul.

When Jesus first began to teach, he held to all the tenets ; but, afterwards, he slowly arrived at the conclusion that the Mosaic law was not a finality, and that the Sabbath was not an especially holy day. His first effort was simply to reform Judaism. He came, not to destroy, but to fulfill : he will not give the meat destined for the children of Israel to Gentile dogs. At first, like John the Baptist, he preached the coming of the Messiah ; and, at length, that he himself was the Messiah. At last he bursts the bands of Mosaic ceremony, cold and dead, and announces a natural religion for all mankind.

Many of his ideas were erroneous, and reflected the beliefs of his time. With God, he placed a devil, and makes a broad road, well traveled, to an endless hell. Rising in his own estimation, he can pardon sins, and is to be the judge of the world. Elated with success, he demands belief in himself as the Messiah, and a confession before men of this faith on pain of future torture. The cities which reject him will suffer a fate worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. He knows not the day nor hour ; but the kingdom of heaven he is to establish is at hand. All things are given to him by the Father ; he is above the temple and the Sabbath ; he commands his followers to ignore all temporal care, sell all they have, and give to the poor, and follow him, — they will not want in the new kingdom.

He was actuated by a grand political motive,

which met with a sad defeat. Then we observe the sorrow of disappointment. The temporal scheme is laid in the dust. A spiritual empire over the minds of men is the only alternative; and, to gain that, his claims must be presented in tangible form. He must enter Jerusalem, and meet an ignoble death.

His cardinal doctrine was, Love man as yourself, and God above all. He was above all forms. That he ever commanded baptism, is doubtful. It was an old form in the East, and might be used as a symbol. The apostles never mention the command; and it is opposed to the spirit of his teachings. There is no evidence that the "Lord's Supper" was intended as a permanent ceremony. These are trappings fastened on his teachings in after-times.

It is said that for Jesus to arise among the intolerant and vindictive Jews, and, in an age of war and blood, promulgate such divine morality, is of itself miraculous. How do we know that he was a Jew? The Gospels pronounce him a Galilean,—a mixed people. Exclusiveness of marriage did not prevail with them; and the peoples of Europe and Asia there met, and unreservedly mingled. The genealogy of the Gospels has been shown to be wholly unreliable; and hence his nationality is unknown. For a Jew to have arrived at his doctrines would have been impossible. The idea of the universal brotherhood of man was nourished by the mingling of the blood of divine races. It is not a Jewish idea, nor the development of a Jewish idea. With the blood of various races flowing in his veins come the

thoughts peculiar to each of the diverse elements, and the composite flowing from their blending. If contact of races gives breadth of view, the effect produced by mingling of blood is greater and more permanent.

Jesus, being an incarnate God, taught with the authority of God. The incarnation is a miracle, and on that primary ground is rejected. One man has no more authority from God to teach than another: the only authority is truth. The sayings of Jesus have authority so far as they are true. If he was a god, or man, this proposition holds. The Church does not rest the claims of Jesus here, but on miracles. It wishes to preserve the authority of the Bible, not its truth. The right of reason presupposes the right of rejection: if this is allowed, there is death to all authority. The Church founds Christianity on miracles, and proves it by miracles. Jesus was a god-man: he became a wonder-worker. In a similar manner, the Moslem proves the Koran; the Hindoo, the Shaster; the Persian, the Zend.

With savages, all is one constant, ever-changing miracle. If religion is proved by miracles, then that which records the greatest number is the best. The Hindoo's outranks the Church's ten to one.

Theologians evade the ruinous premises by ignoring all miracles but those of the Church. The Protestants deny all except those of Jesus and his apostles. Both assume that the divinity of Jesus and his doctrines are proved by miracles recorded in the Bible, and that they occur only in connection

therewith. A miracle is not possible. An event may occur by the action of unknown laws, and seem miraculous. It is not, however. *A miracle is a transgression of a law of nature, by God, to compass some particular end.*

The laws of nature are expressions of the will and purpose of God. He is infinite, perfect, without shadow of turning. Law is the expression of his perfection. To transgress or suspend them, God must annul a part of his own being, which is impossible.

If what are called miracles are effects of higher and unknown laws, then they are not miracles in any sense of the word.

The miracles of Jesus rest on historical evidence alone. The conclusions of reason are against all miracles. If they prove themselves true, it must be by historical proof. This they by no means produce. The three first Gospels are their only evidence; and they are not written by eye-witnesses, and not until nearly a century after the events. The three contradict each other and themselves, and known historical facts. It is singular that Paul, with his fondness for the marvelous, does not mention the subject of miracles. The evidence produced in favor of the miracles of the Gospels really amounts to nothing. It is not a tithe of what can be gathered to support the wonder-workers of more modern times, and would not be entertained for a moment in a court of law.

Not two centuries ago, witches were *known* to

exist; and learned men wrote elaborate works, replete with innumerable facts, to illustrate its influence. We must tread this ground with caution, remembering that a miracle never occurs unless it is looked for.

The error lies in resting Christianity on miracles instead of truth. If Jesus performed all the works ascribed to him, and a thousand times greater, it proves him a wonder-worker, and nothing more. It does not affect what he said, making it true or false, nor weigh an atom in evidence proving his mission divine. If the Church were wise, it would cast out this dead weight, which it now drags like a fetid corpse.

Jesus is to be estimated by the truth he taught. He is to be judged like other men. He did not atone for the sins of the world by his death any more than Socrates or Plato by theirs. His mission was similar to that of all teachers. He is an example, an ideal, as are all good and great men. If a god-man, he is not an example for us, however good a model he may be for other god-men. If an incarnate divinity, he is entirely beyond our imitation. His example is valueless unless he was a mortal like ourselves.

If God was incarnated in Jesus, so he was in Crishna and Buddha. The evidences of each are equally strong. By admitting the possibility of one, we at once become lost in a dense fog of mythic fable. There is no evidence of the events narrated in the Gospels, except what they themselves furnish;

and it has already been shown how vague and contradictory that evidence appears.

What is left? Jesus, a man; the truths he taught; the ideal of a manly life. Far better for us to feel that Jesus is an elder brother than that he was an incarnation far removed from our sympathy.

XVI.

THE ULTIMATE OF THE CHRIST-IDEA.

The wise man preserves in his own bosom the sacred flame which enlightens him, though winds may blow, and tempests roar, without." — PLOTINUS.

When we sin, God does not turn from us. He is not angry. He does not leave us, and consequently does not return to us when we repent. All this is human, and quite foreign from the divine. We separate ourselves from God by departing from that course which is in harmony with nature; and, by restoring our original nature, we return back to fellowship with God.

THE Christ-idea was conceived, with many others, in an age of ignorance, and with them has floated down the stream of time. It is of vast antiquity; and, did that prove anything, it assuredly were true. But here is a startling paradox: *The older an idea, the greater the probability that it is false.* If of great age, it necessarily is the product of a barbarous people, and conceived in ignorance. Such ideas usually contain a glimpse of the truth, but often not even that.

The necessity of a Christ has been already mentioned. He is a step in the chain of dogmas starting from an erroneous conception of the inherent evil of matter, or the belief in the positive existence of evil. The eternal Creator must be beneficent and good. He must have created the world and man perfect. They are not. Hence they must

have fallen from that perfect state, and, by their fall, involved the world. He has thus sinned against the Infinite, and must make adequate atonement. Being finite, he cannot answer the demand. An infinite sacrifice can only be made by the incarnation of God. God becomes a redeemer. With Jesus, the series is complete. Granting the premises, it is logical; but the first term is false, and hence the whole series is erroneous. The whole fabric is built to solve a problem that has no meaning,

The incarnation has another and more beautiful significance: so far as Jesus possessed the truth, he was divine.

If the Holy Spirit can animate one man, it can another. If it can come in contact with the earth in one age, it can in another. If one man can be inspired, it is possible for all men. If one man is divine, so are all men. Here human nature touches and blends. All have a divine nature. Jesus is a shadowy ideal of this real. He actualizes the capabilities of every one.

If man never fell, but is progressing from a barbarous state, he needs no mediator between him and an offended God. No being can take the burden from his shoulders. He must work out his own salvation, and be his own redeemer.

Study first the plan of divine government taught by theologians.

A perfect and omnipotent God creates a perfect man and woman, and places them in a perfect world. They turn out badly, — they fall. To regenerate

and save them, God sends his only son, who is veritably God himself, to be crucified by the very perfect man, who thereby saves himself from eternal destruction. Christ died for us ; we look to him for salvation ; and if we believe on him, even at the last hour, we are safe. The Catholic not only believes in the divinity of Christ, but also in the mother of Christ ; and it is beginning to be received that the mother had a divine origin, and the worship of the grandmother has been inaugurated. It is to be hoped that this idea of incarnation will spread until it is received that every child is an incarnation of divinity, a miraculous conception, to mature a Christ,—a God ; to pass that belief, a blind, undoubting faith comes to stand for the entire moral code.

There is no choice. “Whatever is not a duty is a sin.” A blind obedience is the only praiseworthy passion of human nature. That nature is so absolutely corrupt that there is no hope for any one until he is sure that it is dead within him. We can do nothing without sinning ; but, the more we surrender ourselves to God, the less sin we commit.

Ah, bleak and dreary Calvinism ! how you distract the soul ! And yet how many think the dwarfed, starved, and pinched specimens, treated by this system, models of Christian virtue ! So do we find admirers of the distorted evergreens trained into the forms of pyramids and animals, which disfigure our gardens, who think them more beautiful than the trees of the forest. The elasticity of the tree can be subdued : it becomes so gnarled it ceases to exist.

So the mind can be cramped and stinted until it ceases to rebel ; but it is a terrible state, an imposition and a sham.

These ideas give tone to Christianity. They make it a system to be endured, not of development. It is fitly represented as a grievous cross ; and Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is the most popular, because the most correct, picture of a Christian life.

If the idea of atonement for sin through the sufferings of another were not so generally received, its exposition might be considered a gratuitous task. Really, no belief is so abiding, none more jealously held. The mind, once thoroughly impressed with a belief, ever retains that impression. It finds a moral code ready made, which it is taught to revere, to receive unquestioningly, and which becomes a shell, hard, indurated, impenetrable, from which it is difficult to escape, in which it is very comfortable to reside.

The doctrine appeals strongly to selfishness. We throw our transgressions on the shoulders of another, and are saved by faith. The incentive is purely selfish, — the fear of hell, the hope of heaven.

This is a strange moral government of the world after the divine plan ! Heaven is held out by the infinite Father as a sugar-plum, and hell yawns beneath to frighten ! Can the Church advance out of this system ? Mankind assuredly can and will : but the Church cannot ; for, as soon as it does, its character is wholly changed. There is

no need of a church except to save man in this manner.

We cannot escape through the sufferings of another. We must pay the violation of the moral as unflinchingly as we do the physical code. There can be no evasion. Jesus helps us by his example: that is all he can do for us. We know not the capabilities of our organization. We are beginning the race of eternity. We are like seeds just germinating, buds giving promise of bloom.

The endless succession of sages, philosophers, and scientists, reveal to us our own capabilities. The lowest may take the rank of the highest. The friendless and unfortunate, the despised and outcast, may shine the brightest stars in the future time.

Boundless capabilities, infinite progress, are the birthright of the human mind. It does not look without for its redeemer, but within. Man, if redeemed, must redeem himself. Sin cannot be forgiven: it must be outgrown.

Here is the ultimate of the Christ-idea. It has descended over a long and devious path. The blood of animals has stained its altars; rivers of gore have flowed from the myriads of human beings it has led to sacrifice; and persecution has lifted its red hands to heaven in its behalf,—not in vain. Mankind could not journey over any other road. They are now reaching the goal.

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CONTENTS.

1. Introduction. 2. What is Religion? 3. Dawn of Religious Ideas. 4. Historical Review: Fetichism. 5. Historical Review: Polytheism. 6. Historical Review: Monotheism. 7. Value of the Old and New Testaments as Authority. 8. Influence of Sacred Books on Man's Moral Progress. 9. Progress of Morality dependent on Intellectual Growth. 10. First great theological Problem: The Origin of Evil. 11. Second great theological Problem: The Nature of God. 12. Third great theological Problem: The Future State. 13. Man's Fall, and the Christian Scheme for his Redemption. 14. Man's Position: Free-will, Free-agency, Fate, Necessity, and Responsibility. 15. Man's Duties and Relations to God, his Fellows, and Himself. 16. The Ultimate.

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